LONDON SOCIETY.

JULY 1891.

The Heir Presumptive and the Heir Apparent.

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CHAPTER XXII.

TO describe the state of the Park under the effect of this event would be very difficult. It changed altogether in the most curious way. Indeed Lord Frogmore's country seat had gone through several transformations of late. Nothing could have been more composed, more orderly and perfect than it had been under the sway of Mr. Rogers and Mr. Upjames, the respectable valet and butler, who had organized the life of the bachelor lord into an elegant comfort and tranquillity which was beyond praise. Everything had gone upon velvet in those halcyon days; not a sound had even been heard to disturb the calm, save the sound of conversation among the well-chosen visitors or of a cheerful fire burning, a thing which could not be reduced to absolute subjection. There had never been any hitch in the arrangements; not even a crumpled roseleaf on a couch. The servants moved about like polite ghosts, noiselessly warding off every annoyance. It had been a model of a luxurious house. Then there had come a strange modification when the bride was brought home, and the entire dwelling had recognized her presence with mingled distrust and affection and pride. The flutter of women's dresses about the place and women's voices had been at first difficult for the old servants to bear, who had always hitherto kept the women strictly in their proper places, there being no housekeeper—for Mr. Upjames was more than equal to that office—and only a meek cook to make any division of authority. Rogers and Upjames had, however, on the whole taken kindly to Lady Frogmore, who did

not attempt to make any fundamental changes, and who always was exceedingly civil, and not jealous of their authority; and they were elated to think that their old lord at sixty-eight was equal to taking upon him all the responsibilities of life as if he had been thirty. The mild time of Mary's reign had therefore only added a little brightness, a little ornament, a gentle gaiety to the well-ordered house. Rogers himself had grown younger, and Mr. Upjames added a grace to his perfect manner. The butler had been heard to acknowledge before that he did not feel equal to tackling the ladies, but he made no such acknowledgment now. Lady Frogmore reconciled them to the feminine sex, and the Park gained a certain consequence and liberality and light. It was not so completely centred in the task of making exquisite the comfort of its own master. It began to have thoughts of other people and other things.

But now! The house became at a touch the saddest house. All the great sitting-rooms lay empty, like a sort of vestibule to the rooms upstairs in which trouble and sorrow dwelt. Lord Frogmore came and went with a troubled face. His marriage had not changed his habits much. He had taken all the old precautions to keep in perfect health. His beef tea and his baths, and the certain amount of walking which he preferred any day, and every one of his sanitary regulations had been fully observed as before. But now he cared nothing for any of these things. He walked about all day, going out in the morning after breakfast, and wandering aimlessly about, instead of his habitual brisk constitutional. But when he came in, instead of going to the library to write his letters or read his papers, all that he did was to walk upstairs to the door of his wife's room to see if there was any change. He came in always with a little hope for the first few weeks, confidently expecting each time he asked the question to hear that she was better. But after that his countenance changed. He became very grave, scarcely smiling, seldom speaking to any one. Every time he came in he went upstairs with the same question; but there was something spiritless in his look, in his step, in his aspect generally, which made you feel that he had given up expecting a good reply. And when the poor little baby, who was the cause of all this trouble, was brought out to take the air and walked about in its nurse's arms up and down the avenue, the old lord would walk up and down too, accompanying the

group with a look of such melancholy in his face as was like to break the spectator's heart. The baby it was allowed on all hands was very delicate. The flannel shawls, so soft and white and fine, were scarcely opened a little from its tiny face to let in the sunny atmosphere, and with never a smile on his thin old face the father would walk beside it up and down, up and down. Poor little thing! and poor old gentleman! they were at the opposite extremities of human feebleness, and they fully counted life which should have linked them together was not theirs. Lord Frogmore did not look much at his little boy. He was afraid of the child lest something should happen to it. It was to him rather a part of the substantial nurse who carried it, and in whose powerful arms it was safer than anything belonging to him. And yet he walked by its side with his brisk step subdued, his head cast down, a melancholy languor about him. The starch seemed to have gone out of his collar; his cheeks so rosy and firm had grown limp. To see him turning up and down, up and down by the side of that infant was enough to break any one's heart.

Meanwhile to poor Mary there came but little change. She did not recover as the doctor had promised. She had nothing that could be called a recovery at all. She kept her bed because apparently she had no desire to get up. And sometimes she would hold long conversations about baby clothes and the like with the nurse, rationally enough, as if her mind was able to occupy itself with ordinary duties. Sometimes even she would allow the baby to be brought to her, and cry over it. "Poor little thing!" she would say, "if that is to be its fate; oh, it is not the little thing's fault. I might be to blame, but it couldn't be to blame. Oh, poor little thing. I'll not cry out if you kill me, poor baby. It will not be you, but dreadful, dreadful fate."

"Oh, my lady, don't talk like that. The child will grow up to be your comfort and joy."

"Listen, then," said Mary; "it's only to you I will tell the secret," and she would put her lips to the woman's ear and whisper, that eager, anxious, busy whisper that meant nothing. And when this secret communication was completed, Mary added in her ordinary voice, "So you see we cannot help it, neither he nor I. Oh, to think he should have been born only for this, and to put everything wrong. Take it away, take it away," she would cry suddenly, her voice rising to a scream, thrusting the poor

child into the nurse's arms. And then she would draw the nurse to her and whisper again, "Tell him, tell him," she said; but the whisper was never intelligible, and the look which the poor old lord gave her made the unfortunate nurse lose her head altogether. "Oh, my lord!" the woman said, and Mary nodded her head with satisfaction as if everything was being explained. Lord Frogmore would turn away more wretched than ever, unable to elicit a word or hardly a look which reminded him of her former self, and went downstairs to pace up and down the library, up and down, paying no attention to anything. Never was there a more sad house. Agnes, who remained with her sister, though Mary took no notice of her, would steal down after those dreadful interviews to comfort the poor old gentleman. "She will not speak to me at all," said Agnes, weeping. "She thinks I am a stranger. I don't think she knows me."

"What is she always whispering?" said the old lord. "There must be something in that. The nurse ought to make out what it is. Perhaps she wants something. Perhaps we might find some way to work if we could but know what that whisper was? I don't think you should stand upon a point of honour, but try—try to understand what she says."

"Oh, dear Lord Frogmore," cried Agnes with tears in her eyes. "It is nothing. I don't think she says words at all."

Lord Frogmore in his trouble ignored this speech. "You should not be punctilious," he said, walking about the long room with short agitated steps. "It may be a matter of life and death. You should not stand upon a point of honour. You should make every effort to understand what your dear sister says."

And it was by a sort of pitiful understanding between them that Agnes said no more. He knew as well as she did that poor Mary's whispered communications were unintelligible—but he would not allow it to be said. He preferred to blame some one for an exaggerated point of honour in not listening, not understanding. Such voluntary miscomprehensions are among the most piteous subterfuges of despair.

It cannot be supposed that Mary's condition and the sad change in the house could be long ignored by Letitia, whose every faculty was on the alert to know what, if anything, had followed her last dreadful attempt against the unfortunate mother of the heir. Letitia was as yet unexperienced in what may be called

crime. She had never, as has been said, knowingly assailed the life or reason of a fellow-creature before—and she had not had any certainty that her attempt would be successful. It was not exactly like a knife or a revolver. Letitia was very well aware that such operations as she had carried out upon Mary would not in the least have affected herself, and, therefore, she felt herself justified in ignoring the possibility of serious harm. But when the news was brought to her, whispered with bated breath, that Lady Frogmore's mind was affected, indeed that she was mad, which was the succinct way of stating the matter, Letitia was so much startled and horrified that she cried—which did her great good with her husband. John had been uneasy at the vehemence of his wife's hatred of Mary in her new exaltation, and when he saw her suddenly burst into most real tears his good heart was touched and he felt that he had been doing her injustice. He got up from his seat in his compunction and went to his wife and caressed and soothed her. "You must go over and inquire, Letitia," he said. And once more Letitia was so moved by genuine horror that, anxious though she was to know everything, she held back from doing this.

"Oh, John," she said, "I did perhaps say something that was too strong when I knew what her schemings had come to. They might not like me to go."

"I have always told you, Letitia, I did not think that there was any scheming about it. But, anyhow, Frogmore would be pleased —he would see that we bear no malice. Of course, I felt it at the first just as you did," said the unconscious John.

"The child," said Letitia, "is very delicate, too." She could not help stealing a glance at John under her eyelids to see whether he would respond.

"Poor people!" said John, "or, rather, poor old Frogmore, to put off so long and then have such a sad time of it. I'm very sorry for the poor old fellow."

"He had no right to do anything of the kind," Letitia cried.

"Well, it was hard upon us," said John with a sigh; "but I've made up my mind to it now. You had better go over to-morrow and ask how she is."

Letitia was very eager to go to see with her own eyes what was the condition of affairs, but yet it was not without difficulty that she persuaded herself to return to the house where her last visit had

been so disastrous. It was now September, and the days were beginning to get short, but this time she took no bag nor had she the least intention of staying over the night. An hour would be enough, she thought, to hear all she wanted and see what she could. But her sense of guilt would not be subdued as she approached the house and remembered how she had fled away from it six weeks before, having done all the harm that it was possible to do. She had no intention now of doing any harm; oh no, no! only to inquire and if practicable see for herself what prospect of sanity there was for Mary or life for her boy. When she met in her progress up the avenue in the fly she had hired at the station the little pathetic group above described, the nurse carrying the infant and Lord Frogmore marching melancholy at its side, she hurriedly stopped and sprang out, feeling that Lord Frogmore was likely to be more easily dealt with than Agnes, whose feminine instincts would divine her object. But Letitia did not find that a very gracious reception awaited her. Lord Frogmore looked out with a little irritation as the cab drew up. He evidently thought a visitor an impertinence. When he was compelled by his sister-in-law's eager and excessively affectionate accost to stop in his walk and speak to her, a gleam of angry light came into his eyes.

"Oh, it is you, Mrs. John!" he said.

"Oh, Frogmore," cried the lady, "how is Mary? I could not rest when I heard how ill she was till I had come over to see for myself."

"I do not know," said Lord Frogmore stiffly, "how ill you may have heard she was; but I don't wonder that you should wish to see for yourself."

"No; can you wonder? We have been like sisters almost all our lives."

Though Letitia quaked at the old lord's tone, she felt that it was the wisest way to ignore all offence.

"Sisters, if all tales are true, are not always the best of friends," said Lord Frogmore. "Familiarity interferes with the natural bounds of good breeding. I think, Mrs. John, that I must ask you not to go any further—or at least not to insist on seeing Lady Frogmore."

"Is she so very bad?" said Letitia in a thrilling whisper.

"No," he said with irritation. "I did not say she was very

bad. I said I could not admit visitors who—perhaps might forget what is due to a delicate and sensitive woman."

"I did not know," said Letitia with an injured air, "that I was so little worthy of confidence. I am very sorry that Mary is so ill; so is John. We both felt we could not rest without knowing personally how much or how little of what we hear is true."

"And what do you hear?" Lord Frogmore, though he felt it his duty to defend his wife, was not willingly ungracious, and felt it of all things in the world the most difficult to shut his door in any one's face. His courage failed him when Letitia put forth so reasonable a plea.

"Oh, Frogmore," said Mrs. John, "what is the use of questioning and cross-questioning? Tell me how dear Mary is; that is all I want to know."

He was shaken in his resolution, but still tried to be stern. "What did you say to her," he asked, "the last time you were here?"

"What did I say to her? Oh, a hundred things! and she to me. We talked of how wonderful it was, and how much may come from the smallest event; that if I had not one day met her in the Academy, and asked her to come and stay with me, you might never have met her, and all that has happened would never have been. That was the last thing we talked of. Is it supposed it did any harm—that talk between Mary and me? Oh, Lord Frogmore, people must be malignant indeed if they can find any harm in that."

"I don't know that there was any harm in it. It depends upon how a thing is said, whether there is harm in it or not."

"I know," said Letitia, "that I have enemies in this house. I know Mrs. Hill and Agnes. Oh, Agnes is spiteful! She never wishes to see Mary with me. She thinks I put her against them—as if I would ever interfere between a woman and her own family! But, Frogmore, you know what women are. They are jealous; they are spiteful; they never lose an opportunity to whisper against one that has done better than themselves. I know very well what it is that turns you against me. It is Agnes Hill that has put things into your head."

"No," he said, but doubtfully, feeling that to think so badly of his brother's wife was very inconvenient, and that perhaps after all it was Agnes who had put it into his head; she had not said

much, but it might be she who had suggested it, for it was according to all the tenets with which he was acquainted that a woman should be spiteful, as Letitia said. He hesitated a great deal as to what he should do—whether he should hold by his first resolution to allow Letitia to come no further; or whether it might perhaps be an awakening thing for Mary to see her. Letitia followed him with soft and noiseless steps while he pursued this thought, and then she said suddenly, as if she could contain herself no longer, "Surely, at least, there can be no reason why I should not see the dear child."

She took the baby out of the nurse's arms as she spoke, and deftly, with practised hands, folded down the coverings in which it was wrapped. The mother of five children knew how to handle with ease and mastery, which made the old lord wonder and tremble, the little fragile new-born baby, which to him was an object so wonderful.

"If I were you," said Letitia to the nurse, "I would not have the child covered up so. The air will do him nothing but good. Throw off all your shawls, and let him breathe the good air. I am sure his mother would say so if she were here."

Letitia, at least in that action, meant no harm to the child. She said it as she would have done to any ignorant cottager who half smothered her baby to keep it from cold. But while she held the infant in her arms, and put down her cheek upon its little dark, downy head, an impulse that was horrible came over her. Oh, the little interloper!—the child so undesired, so unnecessary—who had taken her children's inheritance from them! To think that a little pressure more than usual, a little more close folding of the shawls, and it would stand in Duke's way no more. The thought made her strain towards her with a sudden throb of almost savage excitement the little helpless atom, who could never tell any tale.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARY was lying as usual in bed, much shrunken from the Mary we knew, her mild countenance clouded with that haze of trouble which seems to come with any disturbance of the mind. There was no reason that she should lie in bed, except that prostration of will and feeling which came from a disordered brain. It troubled her to move at all, to raise her head, to use her hand,

except in moments of spasmodic energy, when she would spring up in bed, and a stream of wild and terrified life would seem to flow in her veins. Terror was always a chief part of her energy, a desire to fly, to hide herself, to avoid some terrible, ever-menacing danger. On this morning she had been very quiet. For about an hour her sister had been seated by the bedside holding her hand, talking to her about common things; and Mary, when she had replied at all, had replied, Agnes thought, with so much sense and calmness that her heart was quite light. "She is a great deal better, nurse. Don't you think she is a great deal better this morning?" Miss Hill had said. The nurse shook her head, standing on the other side of the bed, but made with her lips a reassuring reply. And peace was in the room, where perhaps the anxious watchers thought excitement and danger were passing over, and all might be beginning to be well.

Suddenly there were voices heard coming up the stairs, approaching the room, a faint little wail from the baby, a soothing hush-sh from the nurse who carried him. And then another voice—not loud, not ungentle, the voice of a woman trying to ingratiate herself with some one who accompanied her. Mary had started at the sound of the infant's cry, but when she heard the other voice she rose up in her bed and put out a terrified hand on each side to her nurse and to Agnes. An anguished look of listening came into her face. She clutched their hands, drawing them in close to her, her eyes staring like those of a hunted creature straight before her, as if prepared to rise and flee. Then Letitia's voice became audible again, "I will just go in. It will rouse her to see me." Both the watchers heard these words distinctly, though they would have sworn that the wild shriek which rang through the house burst from Mary's lips before they were half said. Mary flung herself first on one then on the other with cries that succeeded each other wildly, then she threw herself back into her bed, pulling the coverings over her head. "Save me! save me!" she cried; "Oh, save me, save me!" The force of her hold was such that the women on either side were forced upon the bed, their heads meeting across her concealed and covered head, from which shrieks muffled but terrible still continued to come. "For God's sake, don't bring her in; don't bring her in," cried Agnes, almost as wildly. The group outside paused terrified; Letitia was livid with fear. She

turned back hastily, as if the mad creature who feared her was at her heels, and without saying a word ran downstairs. She had courage enough on ordinary occasions, but to be within reach of a madwoman, which was the unmitigated phrase she used to herself, was not one of the dangers which she could face. She ran as fast as her legs would carry her down the long staircase. No plea for Mary did Mrs. Parke make. Through the ringing of those shrieks, which became more and more hoarse as the unfortunate patient wore herself out, all the bystanders heard the patter of quick little steps running downstairs. She darted out at the open door, and ran along the terrace outside, a self-condemned fugitive: or was she only a nervous woman, terrified, as some people are, of anything that sounds like insanity? The unhappy family heard in their imaginations Letitia's steps running through everything all the dreadful hours that followed. But the fact was that she ran in her panic to where she had left her cab, never drawing her breath, and got into it and drove quickly away. For one thing, she had found out all she wanted to know.

What followed on that dreadful day no one ever knew clearly. Poor Mary, out of her brooding and miserable madness, which yet everybody hoped might in time have dispersed, as the shock and horror that produced it died away from her brain, became for a time acutely, terribly mad, striving to hide herself from the light of day, haunted by a horror of her enemy, who was for ever pursuing her, ready to clutch at her at the door. Her confused brain caught this one point of reality and never relinquished it. Letitia was always at the door to Mary's terrified and distorted fancy. Her voice was always there, saying, "I will go in." Every time the door opened there was a fresh access of the wildest terror, which lasted through days and nights, so dreadful to the watchers, that they could not tell how long it lasted or how often the long day ended in a night full of alarm and terror. Poor old Lord Frogmore, such a picture of an old gentleman; so active, so brisk, so well, doing everything that younger men could do; fell into pathetic ruin, lost his colour, his strength, his spirits, and became an old man in that week of misery. The old vicar from Grocombe and his wife, who came hurrying to the Park, with the idea that the near relations should always be collected on such an emergency, added to the trouble by their

unnecessary presence; for Mrs. Hill, who was not to be kept out of her daughter's room, had to be removed from it periodically in a state of utter prostration, from which it required all the care of Agnes to restore her; and the vicar himself stood about in the hall or the library, staring at everybody who went and came; asking in a hoarse whisper, "Is she any better?" and always in the way.

When this terrible state of affairs had lasted for a week, and every one was worn out, the doctors—for they were now many, Lord Frogmore having summoned every one who could be supposed to be of any help—requested an interview with him; and then announced their opinion that Lady Frogmore should be removed from home. Having thus to renounce the hope he had still been cherishing against hope that her illness might still prove only temporary, the old lord struggled for some time against the dreadful necessity. He declared that he was ready to fill the house with attendants; to undergo any expense; to give up his house entirely to his wife and go away himself if they considered it necessary. But by and by calmer counsels prevailed. Mary's family were more reasonable than her husband. They pointed out to him with much practical sense that he was risking his own health, destroying his own life, without any advantage to her, and that his life was more than ever valuable, for his child's sake, and even for her sake, poor forlorn lady, who had no protector but he. It was hard for him in his weakened state to stand out against the doctors, against the dull persistency of the vicar, who besides could not be got rid of till poor Mary was removed, and against what was more than all, the dreadful sight of Mary convulsed with frenzy, or lying in her calm intervals like a dead thing, her mild face grown into a tragic mask of misery. On the whole it was better not to see that, to have the knowledge of it without having one's heart rent every day by the dreadful, dreadful sight. Lord Frogmore at last consented to this miserable yet inevitable step, which he felt to be a public proclamation of the wretchedness which had so soon closed over the late and tranquil happiness of his old age. He went away for a few days with Rogers, as sad an old man as any under the stars, and gave himself up meekly into his faithful servant's hands, to be brought back to life as far as possible. "Yes," he said, "Rogers, do what you can for me, for I have my little boy to look after,

my poor little baby that ought to have been my grandchild, Rogers."

"Don't say so, my lord. Oh, don't say so. He'll grow up to be a comfort to you."

The old lord shook his head with a melancholy smile. "He's cost me dear; he's cost me very dear; and he's a delicate little mite with no stamina, an old man's child. Poor little beggar that has cost his mother her reason! It would be the best thing for him, Rogers, to die comfortably and be buried with her when I go."

"Oh, my lord, please God, you'll live to see him come of age, and my lady as bright as ever, and all well."

Lord Frogmore gave a deep sigh, and then a little laugh, which was, perhaps, the saddest of the two. "Well," he said, "let's hope so, Rogers, since nobody can tell how it may be."

He could not help wondering sometimes what he had done that this should have fallen upon him in his old age, or if he had done anything, or if God worked no miracles now save in sustaining and supporting the human spirit to bear, but let the laws of nature take their course. It was Mary's nature, he felt, to be thus driven frantic by the thought of having wronged another for her own happiness, and in his sad musings he followed all the course of the story which he himself, without perhaps sufficient motive, had set in motion. He said to himself that perhaps, after permitting John to believe himself to be the heir for so long, it was wrong on his part to have put himself in the position of supplanting John. He thought of his first visit to Greenpark, and wondered whether he had been so petty as to be nettled by little Duke's baby swagger. He had been nettled by it. "When you are dead, papa, and when papa is dead, me——." The child had cleared both John and himself out of his little path with such ease as if it did not matter! He had been vexed—he, a man who ought to have known better—by what the child had said; and was it possible that a little prick of offence like this should have originated all that followed? And then he thought of Mary, his Mary, so patient and sweet, putting up with everything, and with the insolence of the servants, from which he had delivered her. No, no, he could not think he had been anything but right in interfering to save Mary, to raise her above all her tormentors. He had been certainly right to do that—certainly

right! But had it been better for her that he did so? Would not even Letitia's dependant, simply loving and serving Letitia's children, humble enough and poor enough, but reaping the fruits of patience in a gentle life, which was all sacrifice—would not she have been happier like that without rising to triumph (which was out of accordance with her nature) for a time, to be plunged afterwards into such horrible depths? Poor Lord Frogmore, when he had sounded all these depths, was obliged at the end to come back, and to acknowledge that he knew nothing—nothing. Perhaps he had not even done all round what he hoped would be for the best, being moved by wrath against little Duke and pity for Mary, beyond what was reasonable, and so having set all those dreadful agencies in motion—which could not be balked, which must proceed to their natural end. He lost himself in the metaphysics of this question, which was so difficult to fathom. For his brother John and his brother's family had a perfect right to think themselves the heirs, and it was hard, very hard upon them to be displaced. At the same time he himself had a perfect right to marry, and have an heir of his own. Who can decide such questions? and yet one way or another there must have been a harvest of trouble and pain.

When Lord Frogmore returned to the Park, Mary was gone. She was gone and all trace of her, except the poor little delicate baby, the puny thing which had no stamina and which everybody thought would die. Poor little thing, people said, it would be a comfort if it was to die, for it never could have any health to make life pleasant, and madness in the mother's family and the father so old, so that it was not possible he could live to see it grow up. Everybody allowed that it was a most pathetic thing to see the old lord walking in the avenue through all the winter mornings up and down, up and down in the sunshine, beside the bundle of white cashmere which contained this little weakly bud of humanity, the little thing who had not even the honours of his sex, but was called "it" by all who spoke of him. It was a very still little thing, rarely cried, but often when the veil was drawn aside from its face was seen to be gazing up at the heavens with two solemn brown eyes. Kind women cried when they saw this forlorn little creature, worse than motherless, looking up "to where it had come from," some said—"to where it was going fast," said the others. According as they were of hopeful disposi-

tions or not, people took these different views; but all thought it was a most pathetic thing to see old Lord Frogmore taking these silent walks along with his heir.

After a time, when it was seen that difficulties were apt to arise with the child's attendants, some of whom were too kind to him, and some not kind enough, Agnes Hill left Grocombe and came to live at the Park. It was not concealed that she came chiefly to act as head nurse to the boy. But Agnes did not interfere with the father's supervision of his child, nor with their walks, for if she were not so emotional or so interesting as her sister Mary she was very sensible and capable of letting well alone, which is a thing that few persons can do in a masterly way, and women especially are often deficient in. And thus life went on for five or six years. Five or six years! A frightful time if you will think of it for a poor woman to be shut up in an asylum, and to know nothing of the fate of her nearest and dearest. To be sure she was visited periodically, and sometimes knew her friends, and would ask them questions which showed she remembered. But however long the years may be they come only day by day, and this makes them so much more easy to get through—and human nature is the strangest thing, falling into any routine, adapting itself to all circumstances.

Life at the Park fell into this channel and went on quite peacefully, even not unhappily, strange as it may seem. Lord Frogmore recovered his health under the constant ministrations of Rogers. He had an excellent constitution: his cheeks got back their rosy hue and became firm and round again; his step recovered its elasticity. He was again pointed out to everybody as the most wonderful old gentleman of his age in the whole county. He still walked in the avenue daily with his little boy, who, though later than ordinary, learned to walk, and trotted by his old father's side in a way which was not quite so pathetic, making the woods ring with a little voice, which though it was perhaps not so loud as other little boys' voices, was still full of "flichterin' noise and glee." The child was always with his aunt Agnes when he was indoors, and therefore he acquired something of that undue development which falls to the share of those children brought up exclusively among elder people. Lord Frogmore kept up the habit which his wife and he had established at the beginning of their married life, of having Duke very

often at the Park. Duke was now a big boy and at school, but he was exceedingly, tenderly good to the baby, as boys sometimes are. Little Marmaduke preferred his namesake and cousin (whom he had supplanted) to any one in the world. It was the prettiest relationship—to see the big boy so tender to the small one did the heart good. Duke seemed to know that he had something to make up, and was in some special manner appealed to by the delicacy of the little cousin, though indeed it was quite the opposite point of view that commended itself to most people. But Lord Frogmore had thought of that also. He had thought it his duty to provide specially for Duke, which was always something, though it did not by any means subdue the grudge in Letitia's heart.

Thus, however, things went on in a subdued composure and calm of life that was not unhappy. It may be said that the thought of Mary, his wife whom he loved, was never long absent from Lord Frogmore's mind, and gave him many a pang; but still every day, taking off a legitimate time for sleep, is at the least let us say fifteen or sixteen hours long, and there were many intervals in which he did not think of Mary, or at least not exclusively. And little Marmaduke (who was called Mar to distinguish from his cousin) became very amusing as he grew older, and his father doted upon him. In the evening, before it was time to prepare for dinner, and especially in the winter evenings when Mar sat upon his stool before the fire, with the warm light reflected in his eyes, and chattered about everything, the old lord had many happy hours; as happy almost as if it had been Mary and not Agnes who sat on the other side of the fire.

But when a man comes to be seventy-four it is better for him that he should hold these pleasures with a light hand. There seems no reason in particular, in these days when the pressure of age is so much less than it used to be, why a man who has attained that age should not go on till he is eighty-four or more, as is so often the case. But still there are accidents which occur from time to time and prove that humanity is still weak, and that the three-score-and-ten is a fair limit of life. There was very cold weather in the early winter of the year in which Lord Frogmore completed his seventy-fourth and Marmaduke his fifth year. They both took bad colds, belonging as they did

respectively to the most susceptible classes, but little Mar got soon better, whereas Lord Frogmore got worse. It was December, and everything was dark and dreary. The news from the Asylum was agitating, for it was reported that Lady Frogmore was passing through an unexpected crisis of her malady, and that "a change" might take place at any moment. A change! What did that mean? When people in an ordinary illness speak of a change it generally means death. Was this to be the end of everything? The morning after the disturbing intelligence was received Lord Frogmore was in a high fever, and the doctors looked very anxious. It seemed as if poor little Mar was about to lose both parents at once.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LORD FROGMORE'S bronchitis was very severe, so bad that the doctors looked very serious, and, notwithstanding the vigilance and understanding of Rogers, who knew his master, as he said, better than any of them—insisted upon adding a trained nurse to all the other embarrassments of the great establishment, which were so heavy upon the shoulders of Agnes Hill. The old lord's grave condition, the ominous announcement of "a change" in her sister's state, the care of that house full of servants, the jealousy of Rogers, who could not endure "the woman" who had been placed over his head, and in the midst of all the two noisy boys—Duke, who was at the Park for his holidays, and little Mar, who considered it part of his religion to do everything that Duke did—went near to overwhelm poor Agnes, who had never been used to any great responsibility, and was anxious beyond what words could say. She might, indeed, have spared herself all trouble about the house, since Mr. Upjames, the butler, was fully equal to any emergency; but the susceptibilities of Rogers were a very serious matter. "The only thing for me to do, Miss 'Ill, is to retire," he said. "To have a woman put over my head, and one as knows nothing about it, is more than I can be expected to put up with."

"Oh, Rogers, you must not leave your master. What could he do without you?" cried Agnes, with anxious conciliation.

"That's what I say, ma'am," said Rogers. "I'm torn in two, I am. My lord gives me a look! Though he's choking with

his cough, he does like this with his finger; and then he points to her, and he does like that——"

Rogers imitated first the motion of beckoning and then that of pushing away.

"I will speak to the doctor when he comes," said Agnes. "But oh, Rogers, you would never have the heart to leave him? What does it matter about the nurse? Try to make her useful. She does know a great deal, and she might be useful——"

"She don't know nothing about my lord, Miss 'Ill; nobody but me knows my lord," said Rogers solemnly. "I know just what he'll bear, and what he won't bear. He can't be treated like an 'ospital case. And that's what them women do. As if he was just a number in a bed! He's been very different all his life, has my lord; and that's what he won't bear."

"No," said Agnes soothingly. "Of course he won't bear it; and you must just stand between him—— Rogers, what is that? I am sure I heard a carriage driving up to the door."

"It will be some one coming to inquire," said Rogers. "Don't you be frightened, Miss 'Ill. If I can get free of that woman, don't you be miserable. We'll pull him through."

"Do you think it can be any one coming to inquire?" cried Agnes. "Surely there is a great commotion downstairs. Oh, Rogers, for heaven's sake go and see what it is. I heard a cry. What's that? What's that? Surely I know that voice."

Agnes did not know what she feared. There were sounds on the stair which denoted some strange events—many voices together—the sound of steps hurrying. She stood at the door half afraid to open it, listening intently, overcome with alarms which she could not explain. What had happened? The voices came nearer, one of them talking in gentle but persistent tones. Agnes threw up her arms and uttered a wild but faint cry. What did it mean? What could it mean? The wildest hallucination, or her sister's voice?

And then the door was opened quickly, and into the wintry daylight, in which there was no mystery, Mary walked without excitement—smiling, yet with a serious face, as if she had never left her own house where she was supreme, but was coming upstairs after a private consultation with the doctor, in which he had told her that her husband was ill, but not so ill as to cause any extreme of anxiety. She came in smiling to Agnes, and

taking both her hands, kissed her. "I am so glad," she said, "to find you here. Then Frogmore has had some one to rely upon. Fancy! I have been away on a visit, and they never told me he was ill till to-day."

"Oh, Mary, dear!" Agnes cried. She was choking with excitement and emotion, but the imperative gesture by which her sister's companion warned her to be on her guard stopped the tears in her eyes and the words in her mouth. Even in that glance Agnes perceived that it was the doctor in whose care Mary had been placed who came in behind her. This did something to still the beating of her amazed and anxious heart.

"Oh, Rogers," said Mary, "I am so glad to see you before I go to him. How is he? He was quite well when I left home. Do tell me everything before I go to him; for I am sure you have never left him, you faithful servant—more faithful than his wife," she said with a smile, turning to the doctor, who stood behind. Lady Frogmore looked exactly as if she had come from a visit as she said, a little troubled that she had not been sent for at once, yet scarcely anxious. Agnes even thought she looked younger, better, more self-possessed than of old.

"You were not aware he was ill, Lady Frogmore. You must rest a little and get warmed, and take something—a cup of tea, perhaps—before you go to his room. You must not take in too much cold air to the room of a patient with bronchitis. In the meantime I will go—shall I?—and bring you an exact report."

"Do!" said Mary. "That will be the kindest thing. I can trust to what you say. But it is cold this morning," she added walking up to the fire. "I must not go and touch my dear old lord with cold hands. How are they at home, Agnes? and how long have you been here?"

"They are quite well," said Agnes, very tremulous. "My father begins to show signs of getting old——"

"I thought him very well indeed the last time I saw him," said Mary; "he can't have grown much older since then. I wonder," she added, "how Frogmore got this bad cold—it must have been the very night I went away. I think men cease taking care of themselves when they have a wife to do it for them. And Rogers used to coddle him so—I must blame Rogers. He ought to have returned to his old habits and watched him more carefully when I was away. What is this, Upjames? Tea?

Yes, give it me; it will warm me. I must be warm, you know, when I go to my lord."

"Yes, my lady," said Upjames in a trembling voice. He was very pale and there was fright in his voice, though he was a large man and his restored mistress so slim and little likely to harm any one. "I—I—am so happy, my lady—to see your ladyship so much better."

"Oh, there has been nothing the matter with me," said Mary quickly. "I am always well. But you should not have let my lord catch cold, Upjames, the moment my back was turned. How am I ever to go off on a visit again, however short it may be, when you take so little care of my lord?"

The big butler trembled like a leaf, a gasp came from his throat, his large cheeks hung pendulous with fright. "My lady, I—don't know how it happened," he stammered forth.

"Oh, I was only joking," said Mary; "I am sure it was no one's fault; only there should be double precautions taken about health, by every one, when the mistress of the house is away." She gave forth this maxim with a precision that had never been usual with Mary. Altogether it seemed to her sister that Lady Frogmore had never been so sure of herself, so conscious of authority before. She drank her tea before the fire with evident comfort and pleasure in her home-coming. "After all," she said, there is nothing like one's own house. What is that I see over there? A rocking horse, is it? I suppose it is a present for one of the Greenpark children. Yes, Mr. Marsden. How do you find my lord?" Fortunately, as Agnes felt, though she scarcely knew why, the doctor came in at this juncture and saved her all further trouble.

"Not so well as I could wish," said the doctor, "but very glad to know that you have arrived, Lady Frogmore, and anxious to see you. You must not," he added, laying his hand on her arm, "look anxious, or as if you thought him very ill. His spirits must be kept up."

Mary rose and put down her teacup on the table. "I am afraid you find him worse than we thought."

"No," he said, "oh, no—but only to warn you. He does look a little ill; but he must not see that you are anxious. You must make an effort, Lady Frogmore."

"I think I do nothing but make efforts," she said with a cloud

upon her face, standing with her hands clasped together. Then she added, smiling, "But of course I will do what you tell me. How can he have got so ill the little time I have been away?"

Agnes followed, with her heart beating tumultuously in her bosom. What did it all mean? The little time she had been away! What could it mean? Mary spoke as if she had been absent for three days or so—and it was five years! Oh, what could it mean? Agnes followed, not knowing what to do. On her way to the sick room Mary took off her cloak and furs and her bonnet, which she piled upon a table in the corridor. "Tell Mason to take them," she said. Mason was the maid who had left the house when Mary had been taken away.

How strange it all was, and incomprehensible! This morning Agnes had trembled for the arrival of the letters, not knowing to what tragic tidings the agitating news of "a change" might have come—and had felt as if the burden of anxiety on her was insupportable. Now, was it lifted from her shoulders, or had it become incalculably more heavy? She could not tell. She followed with tremulous steps to the door of Lord Frogmore's room, and then came back again, not venturing to enter. There was nothing for it but to wait till some further development should take place, till something should happen—she did not know what she hoped or feared. Lord Frogmore was very ill. Would the sight of him drive his wife back into the frenzy from which she seemed to have escaped? Would her bewildering appearance act favourably or unfavourably upon the old man, whose vitality had fallen so low? Would sorrow, if sorrow was coming, undo the astonishing advantage that had been gained? Of all these confusing questions the mind of Agnes was full to bursting. She tried to return to the morning room where she had been occupying herself as best she could, and keeping down her anxiety when Mary arrived. It was only an hour ago, but how everything had changed! And the boys? What could she say to the boys? How account to them for the strange events that had taken place while they had been out with the forester watching him mark the trees? They were anxious to tell her all about this when they came in, little Mar echoing every word that Duke said, and striking in with little bits of observation of his own. Agnes, generally so admirable a listener, could scarcely hear what they said for the tumult in her own breast. What was she to say

to the children? The meeting, when it came, what would it be? Mary, who thought she had been absent on a visit of a few days, what, oh what would she say to her son? Poor Agnes was like a woman distracted. She trembled at every sound. And to think that she had to sit at table with those eager boys and to give them their dinner, and talk to them in terror every moment, lest the door should open and Mary come in. For what would Mary say to her child?

Every torture comes to an end if we can but wait for it, and the children's dinner was ended at last: they were so eager about the forester and the trees he was marking to cut down that to Agnes's intense relief they hurried out again as soon as their food was swallowed. Fortunately nobody had told them of the arrival, or else they had been too much absorbed in their own exciting occupation to dwell upon it. Little Mar knew nothing of his mother. Even if he had heard that Lady Frogmore had come home the child would probably in the bustle of his childish excitement have put no meaning to the words. And Duke, though he was older, and had been Mary's favourite, yet he had much forgotten her, and would think only of his grandmother if he heard that name. This gave poor Agnes a little comfort in the hurry of her thoughts. She sat alone all the day, more anxious and miserable than words could tell. The doctor—Lord Frogmore's own doctor—came in for a moment to tell her that he found his patient a little better. "What an astonishing recovery this is. It is the most wonderful thing I ever saw," he said. "She has taken her place by the bedside, as good a nurse as I ever met with. She seems to think of everything. And Lord Frogmore looks quite bright. The cure of one will be the cure of the other, I hope. But it is the most wonderful thing I ever saw."

"Do you think it will last, doctor?" cried Agnes.

"Well, one can never say," he replied oracularly. "Sometimes these things prove a success, sometimes—not. I could not give an opinion. To tell the truth, I would not trust Lady Frogmore with my patient if Marsden was not there. He keeps in the dressing-room out of sight—but he's there, and on the watch. These mad doctors have strange ways, but I daresay he's right. He has his eye on her all the time. He's not very sure about her, I suppose, or he would not do that; but you and I may make ourselves easy, Miss Hill. It is Lord Frogmore who is my affair—

and he is better—certainly better. I will come in the evening and let you know how he is then."

Agnes, on whom the household affairs told heavily, and who had the anxious concern of a simple woman to whom the provision of meals is one of the chief businesses of life, about regular food, here put in a troubled question about lunch. What should she do about lunch? She had given the boys their dinner, thinking it better not to disturb Lady Frogmore. But they must have luncheon. What should she do about lunch? It was reassuring to know that a tray had been taken to the dressing-room, and that Lady Frogmore had been attended to by the watchful guardian who was sharing her vigil. It was very strange altogether. It disturbed Agnes in every possible way in which a quiet woman could be disturbed, but yet it was a relief. And Miss Hill sat down again with the needlework which was so poor a pastime in her hands to-day, thinking, wondering, questioning to herself till she could question no more. Many a broken prayer rose to heaven that afternoon for Lord Frogmore. Oh! that he might but live. Oh! that he might get better. His life was more valuable, Agnes thought, than it ever could have been before. It would be his business to clear up all this imbroglio—to make everything clear. He would have the responsibility; the power would be his alone, and surely, surely, all would go well. Agnes would not look upon the other side of the picture. There must be no other side to the picture. She could not allow herself to think of what darker prospect there might be.

It was evening when Mary came into the drawing-room where Agnes was. The doctors were making their last examination of the patient for the night, and she came in to rest a little; to change the air, as she said; to refresh herself. It was time for the boys to go to bed, but they had not paid much attention to Agnes's entreaties, and in the disorganization of the house, which was full of consternation and inquiry, no authoritative messenger from the nursery had as yet come for little Mar. He was seated on his usual stool before the fire, which gave a ruddy colour to his rather pale little face, and sparkled in his dark eyes. Duke lay on the rug, stretched out at full length at Agnes's feet. They were chattering still of their busy day.

"I wouldn't let him mark that old bush," said little Mar; "it's like an old man. Not an old man like papa, but one I've seen with a long beard. Papa's an old gentleman, and they say I'm a little old man, and for love of us I wouldn't have him mark that tree. Oh! Aunt Agnes, here is a lady! Is it the lady that came with a post-chaise, and the marks are all over the grass? Is it——"

"Hush! oh, hush! Mar—don't say a word," cried Agnes, with her heart leaping in her throat.

Mary came in and sat down beside Agnes, a little behind the boys' backs.

"I will not come to the fire," she said, "for Frogmore's room is very warm. I prefer to get cooled a little. I think he is better, but we will see what the doctors say. They say I ought to lie down, but I don't think I shall want it to-night. I am quite fresh. One never wants to lie down one's first night."

"Oh, my dear! surely, surely they will not let you sit up?"

"Why not?" said Lady Frogmore. "I am quite fresh. I have had no fatigue as yet. And he was so pleased to see me. They all say it has done him good to have me back. What is that on the rug at your feet, Agnes? Why, it is a child. Why, it is—Duke! My dear boy, I didn't know you were here. Why, what a leap you have taken. What a huge, great boy you have grown——"

Duke had sprung to his feet in the surprise. There was little light but the light from the fire, and it was five years since he had seen her. He came forward, hesitating a little, abashed and reluctant to be kissed. He was now twelve and big of his age, not apt to go through these salutations with strangers. Mary put her hands on his shoulders, and held him from her to see him fully. "I can't believe my eyes. Duke—are you sure you are Duke? You are twice as big as you were the other day. Agnes, I can scarcely believe my eyes."

Agnes gave Duke a pull by the arm to stop his exclamation. "Yes," she said, "he has grown very fast."

"I never saw any child grow so fast," said Mary in a bewildered tone. "I should scarcely have known the child." She let him go with something of disappointment in her tone. "I can scarcely believe he is my little Duke," she said. And then, after a pause, there came the question which Agnes had been

all this time trembling to hear. Mary recovered herself, putting away this touch of disappointment, and spoke again in the clear, assured tones which were new to her sister.

"And who," she said, "is this other nice little boy?"

Agnes was overcome by the sufferings of this long and agitating day. Her strength was exhausted. She could bear no more. Little Mar had turned round upon his stool and was gazing at the lady. And she, with a smile and the pleased half-interest of a benevolent stranger, looked at him, holding out her hand. "Who," she said, "is this nice little boy?"

Agnes answered—she could not help it—with something more like a scream than an exclamation, "Oh, Mary! Oh, Mary!" she cried.

"What is the matter?" said Mary tranquilly. "I ought to know him, perhaps. He is one of Duke's little playfellows, I suppose. Who are you, my nice little boy?"

CHAPTER XXV.

LADY FROGMORE was called to her husband before she had any answer to her question from little Mar. She had asked it with great kindness, with the sweetness of manner which Mary always had with children from the time of her early experiences in the parish with the sturdy little Yorkshire babies—but she had not, to tell the truth, been very deeply interested in the reply. Duke's little playmate had a certain interest, because of Duke, that enormously grown, curiously developed boy, but otherwise—"Good-bye, just now, my little man," she said, kissing her hand to him. "Lord Frogmore wants me. I shall hear all about it when I come back." Little Mar crept to the knee of Agnes Hill when Mary went away. He clung to her with a close childish pressure, rubbing his little head against her shoulder. "Why does she call papa Lord Frogmore?" the boy said.

"I don't know, my dear. She has been gone a long time from home—and there are some things—that she has forgotten."

"Who is the lady, Aunt Agnes?"

"Oh, Mar!" cried Agnes, with a tone of reproach.

"I know," said the little boy. "You told me—but even grown-up people, old people make mistakes, don't they, sometimes? It must be—a mistake——"

Agnes shook her head, but she could not find a word to say. Her heart was like a stone within her. Had such a thing ever been heard of as that a mother should forget her only child!

But Mary's heart was not heavy. She went away lightly through the long corridor to the old lord's room, and entered it like a sunbeam, smiling on every one. Mary had been a woman easily cast down in her old natural life, an anxious woman, a little apt to take a despondent view. But she was so far from being despondent now that she scarcely showed gravity enough for a sick room. She went in and took her place by the sick bed where her old husband lay, shrunken and worn out, with fever in his eyes, and a painful cough that tore him in two.

"I think," she said, "that already you are looking a great deal better, Frogmore."

"I am afraid the doctors don't think me better," said the old lord, "and to be prepared in case of anything that may happen I want to have a very serious talk with you, my dear."

"Nay, Frogmore," she said, with a beaming smile, "not so very serious. The chief thing is to keep up your spirits. I know by experience that it is half the battle. We shall have plenty of time for serious talks."

"Well, my love—I am willing to hope so," said Lord Frogmore, with a faint smile. "But it can do us no harm to make sure. There are a few things I am very anxious to talk over with you. I shall be very sorry to leave you alone, my poor Mary, especially now when there are such good hopes. Our life together has not been so cloudless as I had hoped—but you have made me very happy all the same, my dear love. You must never forget that."

"Dear Frogmore," said Mary in a slightly injured tone, "I cannot imagine what you mean when you say our life has not been cloudless. It sounds as if you were disappointed in me—for to me it has been like one long summer day!"

"My poor dear—my poor dear!" he said, feebly caressing the hand that held his own.

"Not your poor dear! I have been a happy woman—far more happy than I could ever have looked for—but I mean to continue to be so," she added with a little nod of her head which was almost coquettish. "I haven't the least intention of talking of it as if it were in the past."

Behind Lady Frogmore in the distance of the large room was some one who looked little more than a shadow, but who took a step forward when the conversation came to this point, and made a warning gesture to the old lord over his wife's head. Lord Frogmore replied with an impatient twitch of his eyebrows and resumed:

"I don't want to vex you, my love—but life's very uncertain for the best of us. It's hard to tell what a day is to bring forth. I never thought this morning that I should be so happy as to have you with me, Mary, to-night."

"No," she said, "how wrong it was of them not to tell me; of course, the moment I was told I came away at once. But you must have known that I would come as soon as I knew that you wanted me, Frogmore."

"Yes," he said, with his kind, indulgent smile. "I ought to have known that. At all events, my dear, here you are at last."

"At last. He talks," said Mary with a laugh, as if appealing to some one, "as if I had been years away."

The poor old lord patted her hand with his feverish fingers. There was something piteous in the contrast between his serious anxiety and the light-hearted confidence in her tone. "Well," he said after a time, "my love—to return to what we were saying. I needn't tell you, Mary, the chief subject I am concerned about—the bringing up of little Mar. You can't think," he said after a pause with a little fervour, "what that baby has been to me while you've been away."

"What baby?" she said, almost with a look of offence, drawing away her hand. "I am surprised, Frogmore, that you should want any one to take my place for—such a short time."

"To take your place?" he said. "Oh, no; but to wait for you along with me: for to whom else could it be of so much importance, next to me—and who could comfort me like him, Mary? You must be strong now for Mar's sake."

"I don't know what you mean, Frogmore," she said, her colour changing. "It is impossible to me to make out what you mean. You seem to speak in riddles. I don't know who this child is you have taken such a fancy to. But you mustn't expect me to follow you in that. I will do anything for your sake, dear! but to give myself up to a strange child whom I know nothing about——"

"Whom you know nothing about! Oh, Mary, my poor Mary," he cried.

"Whom I know nothing at all about," she said with some vehemence. "The one, I suppose, that comes in to play with Duke. Frogmore, I hope you have not given Duke's place in your heart to any stranger. Oh, I say nothing against the boy!"

"To a stranger!" cried the old man, with a piercing tone of pain.

"Oh, my dear Frogmore, oh, my dear! I would not for the world cross you, and if it is a little favourite—of course I shall take care of him, and love him—try to love him—for your sake; but you must not care for him too much on the other hand," she said playfully, though with an effort, lifting up her finger—"to interfere with me—or Duke——"

The old gentleman looked at her with eyes full of pain—"Oh, my poor Mary," he said, "can you not remember—try and remember—what happened before you went away."

"I remember very well, my dear," she said; "only it is strange that you should talk of my going away as if it had been something of the greatest importance. To hear you speak one would think I had deserted you—run away from you—left you alone for years."

"Dr. Marsden," said Lord Frogmore. He repeated the call impatiently in another minute, "Dr. Marsden!"

"Do you want to speak to Dr. Marsden? I am sure he will be here directly. Oh, here he is," said Mary, looking round with a little surprise. "He must have been quite close by."

"Dr. Marsden," cried Frogmore, with a gasp for breath, "is this how it is always to be?"

"Oh, I hope not," said Dr. Marsden. "Things will arise naturally to awaken old recollections; but we must not force anything—we must not force anything. In that case we should only lose what we have gained."

"But I have no time to wait," cried the old lord; "I—have no time to wait——"

As he spoke he was seized with one of the dreadful fits of coughing which shook his old frame. There is nothing more dreadful than to look on at one of those *accès* which threaten to shake the very life out of a worn and exhausted body, and to feel how utterly helpless we are, how incapable of doing anything to relieve or succour. Mary, though she was so placid and confident,

so sure that all would be well, was greatly troubled by this attack. She had always been thought a good nurse, but for a good nurse in the uninstructed sense there is nothing so difficult, nothing so dreadful as to do nothing. She hurried to put her arm under the pillows to raise up the sufferer, to support him in her arms, and was altogether cast down when her trusted doctor put his hand upon her shoulder and drew her away.

"But something must be done—his head must be raised—he must be supported——"

"My dear lady, he must be left alone—you only disturb him," the doctor said.

She withdrew to a little distance and cast herself down in a chair and covered her face, but it was not enough not to see, for she could still hear the spasm that shook his old frame. He must be left alone—you only disturb him——. What terrible words are those to say! Was it, she wondered in her confused brain, because of the delusion in his that she had abandoned him? How could he think she had abandoned him? His head must have gone wrong to think of her short visit to the Marsdens as if it had been a desertion. And this little boy who had been a comfort to him——! Mary could not understand it. The heart which had been so light to come home, so sure that as soon as she was there to take care of him Frogmore would get well, began to sink: You only disturb him! Oh, was it possible that this was the sole issue of her nursing, she who had always been considered the best of nurses? Mary began to cry silently, under cover of the hands in which she had hidden her face, and despair stole into her heart. The sound of the coughing filled the room, persistently, going on and on. Now and then came a break and she thought it was over, but it only began again. And the doctor stood there, only looking on, doing nothing, and Rogers, who somehow stepped out of the shadow behind in anxious attendance too, was doing nothing. So many of them, with the command of everything that money could buy, and yet they could do nothing. The poorest tramp on the wayside could not have coughed more incessantly or with less help from anything that could be done for him than Lord Frogmore.

After this the evening seemed to speed away in an incoherent troubled blank, as it does when illness is present absorbing every interest. It seemed to be ten o'clock, then midnight, before any

one was aware that the day was ended: and yet every minute was so long. Mary sat a little apart, with a strange pained sensation of reluctance to subject herself again to that reproach—*You disturb him*—which rankled in her mind, and vaguely, dimly saw many things pass which she did not understand. The little boy, for instance, was brought in, and flung himself upon Frogmore's bedside, the old lord turning his worn face to him, stroking the little pale cheeks with his trembling withered hands and kissing the child again and again. "Oh, father," the child said, "father!" and Frogmore murmured, "My little boy, my little man!" in his feeble voice, again and again. Mary sat bolt upright and looked on, with I cannot tell what wonder and wretchedness in her eyes. She was put away from her husband's side, and this little thing had his tenderest words. Where had he come home from, that little boy? and by what strange chance had he thus become the sweetest and dearest thing to Frogmore? Some time in the middle of that long feverish blank which was the night Dr. Marsden came to her and insisted she should go to bed. "He is a little quieter now, and there is nothing to be done, nothing. Nothing that you or any one can do. You promised to do whatever I told you when I said I would bring you home, Lady Frogmore."

Mary made no answer to this voice which came to her in the long silence, and which she was not very sure was anything but a voice in a dream. She looked up into the face of her doctor with a dumb obstinacy which he did not attempt to overcome. For her only answer she crept back to the bedside, and took her place again there, and watched and watched, till a cold blue light stole through the closed curtains and every crevice, and the candles and lamps seemed to grow sick and pale, and it was day again. Frogmore's face looked grey like the daylight, when that pitiless all-pervading light came in; but his eyes turned to her with wistful affection, and he put out his old, withered, aged hand. And then the light faded away.

When Lord Frogmore died his wife behaved like a woman whose sanity was completely restored. The mad doctor, who had proved himself both wise and kind in his unexpected attendance at this death-bed, watched her with the most anxious care, but with great relief. She understood the blow that had fallen upon her, and her grief was great and natural, but self-controlled. She burst forth into no ravings, nor did she show any want of com-

prehension. She allowed herself to be taken away when all was over, and yielded to the directions of her physician with the old gentle docility. After an hour or two of quiet weeping she fell asleep, with her hand in her sister's hand—a gentle woman stricken with deep loss, but very patient, giving no trouble, just what Mary would have been in other circumstances. Agnes Hill sat by her for hours, feeling as if in a sanctuary, while she listened to her sister's calm breathing, and saw the soft tears steal from under her eyelids—a sanctuary of peaceful sorrow, of patience, not rebellious, not excessive, least of all mad. Agnes sat and cried with an ache in her breast which Mary did not know. The boy! What was to happen to the boy? When Mary woke again, when she came out again into ordinary life, and if the amendment continued and her sanity was recognized, could it be that she would still ignore the boy?

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THERE is no will but the early one made soon after the marriage," said Lord Frogmore's man of business on the morning of the second day. "No guardians appointed, no directions given. I have said as much as I could from time to time on this subject. Lord Frogmore always agreed, but did nothing; and now here we have a long minority to face, and nothing in order." He was speaking in the most confidential circle of the family, addressing the old vicar, who had been summoned with his wife to the double crisis, the death of their son-in-law, the recovery of their daughter. Old Mr. Hill was standing up with his back to the fire, looking like a very solemn old sheep with his white beard. He had always the air of bearing the weight of the whole world on his shoulders, and mumbled a little in his speech, half with nervousness, half with that weight of responsibility that bowed him down.

"It is a very great emergency," said the vicar. "Frogmore was very imprudent for a man of his time of life. He ought to have had it all made out very clear. He ought to have left nothing in any doubt. I have often said to him myself in my own small affairs——."

It was wrong of Mrs. Hill to interrupt, but she had a bad habit of doing this; her husband spoke so slowly. "Now that my daughter is so well again," she said, with a voice in which there was a quiver in spite of herself, "it can't matter so much."

"Oh, mother!" cried Agnes.

The man of business shook his head. "That is just the worst difficulty of all. If Lady Frogmore insists on this strange fancy of hers, that the little lord is not her son—that she has no child——"

"Oh!" cried the mother, in a tone of intolerable impatience. "That is nonsense, you know, Mr. Blotting. Why, I was there! How can she persist, when everybody knows to the contrary? My daughter Mary has been troubled in her mind, poor thing; but she never was idiotic, I hope—and when I speak to her—Agnes, what nonsense! I must speak to her! It is the most dreadful dereliction of duty to let things like this go on——"

"Dr. Marsden says she is going through a very important crisis," said Agnes; "and that her mind must not be disturbed——"

"Oh, Dr. Marsden!" cried Mrs. Hill: she did not say blank him, or dash him, or anything that a clergyman's wife ought not to say—but she meant it, as was very clear. "How should Dr. Marsden know better than her mother?" she inquired with dignity, as if to such a question there could be but one reply.

"I am of the same opinion as your mother," said the vicar. "I think you will find after I have had a conversation with her that there will be no further trouble. She will not stand out against me."

"Oh!" Mrs. Hill cried—and stopped again—for she had not the same faith in her husband's intervention. "But," she added quickly, "I am of opinion that when she is told the facts calmly, with the proofs I can bring, for I saw everything with my own eyes, Mary, who was always a reasonable creature—you know," she cried, with a little laugh and toss of her head, "there never was such a thing known in this world as that a mother should disown her child."

"No doubt," said Mr. Blotting, "there will be no want of proof. The little lord's rights are safe enough. But who's to have the custody?—not a mad mother who disowns him——"

"Sir!" cried Mrs. Hill, springing to her feet.

"Mr. Blotting," said the vicar, "forgets, my dear—forgets of whom he's speaking. Such a phrase used of my daughter——"

"I beg your pardon," said the man of business. He looked at Agnes, who had said nothing, whose eyes were anxiously fixed

upon him. "I mean no offence. I must face the facts. What would the Court of Chancery or any other authority think of a mother who denied that her child was hers? She says she knows nothing about it, that she never had a child. It's monstrous; it's incredible. She says the most astounding things."

"What, what?" cried the old people, both together. They were half reproachful of Mary, wholly impatient of her folly, yet half excusing and apologizing all the time.

"She says it is quite impossible she could ever have done such a thing. I can only give you the poor lady's own words. She says she was bound in honour to some one—a woman's name—probably you will know. Poor soul! Bound in honour to Jane or Marjorie never to have a child! I don't want to hurt your feelings, but who do you think would give her the charge even of her own affairs after such a speech as that?"

"Who is Jane or Marjorie?" said the vicar, mouthing the words. "I don't know anybody of those names."

The mother and daughter looked at each other. They were under no difficulty in understanding.

"Oh," said Mrs. Hill, "her worst enemy! Do you mean to say that after all my poor child has borne from that woman——"

"Dear mother!" said Agnes. "Oh, let us wait a little—let us do nothing in a hurry. I suppose it has been known before that a poor woman might be sane enough with one delusion. That is Mary's case. She is sane, but she has forgotten. She never saw her baby. It seized her at once, that terrible trouble. She never knew. Don't you remember, mother, how she lay like a log, never caring, never looking at him? Oh, Mr. Blotting, don't let her be sent away again for that! In every other way she is sane; my poor sister is sane."

"I am sincerely sorry for you, Miss Hill," the lawyer said. But he gave no pledge, he made no promise. "It will depend chiefly upon John Parke," he said, "as one of the executors and the child's uncle. He, of course, is the natural guardian. And he no doubt will hear what the doctors have to say, and decide—what is best to be done with Lady Frogmore."

"John Parke!" both the old people cried again; Mrs. Hill adding in almost a shriek—"And Tisch—Tisch, who hates my poor Mary, who would like to kill her! Oh, you will never put the boy in her hands."

"I fail to see," said the vicar mumbling, "I fail to see what can be the need of John Parke when her parents are here."

"My dear sir," said the man of business, "John Parke is the nearest relation. He's an executor. He's the heir, if anything should happen to the little boy—a very delicate little boy, I hear, like old men's children generally—and with insanity on one side. You really must forgive me if I speak my mind. I have been connected with the Parkes, I and my firm, for longer than any one can say; but I never knew such a sad conjunction of affairs."

The Hills, it was evident, were very much startled by this speech. The vicar stood before the fire swaying his heavy head, looking at the floor, while Mrs. Hill, who was more active of mind, made little starts as if to begin speaking, then stopped with the words on her lips.

"Do you mean to say," said Agnes, "that everything will be in —Mr. John Parke's hands?"

"I am the other executor," said the man of business, not without a little demonstration of the importance which these country people had seemed to ignore.

"But," said the vicar, "we are Lady Frogmore's parents—I am the child's grandfather, nearer than an uncle. Why, my wife was here when he was born."

"And we have no object to serve," cried Mrs. Hill, bursting forth, "none, none, but their good. It's for John Parke's advantage that—that harm should come. He can't be supposed to be fond of little Mar. And his wife—why, Tisch, Tisch, everybody knows!—she has her own boy that she thinks ought to be the heir. He's not safe, he's not safe if he's in Tisch Grocombe's hands!"

"Mother, mother!" cried Agnes in dismay.

"You will excuse me saying," said the lawyer, "that I can't listen to anything of this kind. Ladies go a long way, I know, in what they permit themselves to say of each other, but with men of the world, madam, libels can't be indulged in. Mrs. John Parke——"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Hill, breathing out fire and fury in the word, "what has Mrs. John Parke to do with my child—or with my grandchild, Mr. Blotting? We have no object but their good. We want nothing but their good. If anything were to happen to little Mar it would be my death. Oh, can't you see, can't you

see the difference? I don't say she would poison him or throw him out of a window," cried the old lady, flushed and trembling with her vehemence; "but it would be for her good that the child should die. Do you hear me, oh do you hear me! It would be to her advantage that the child should die, the dear child, the apple of our eyes. It would give her husband the title—and herself, which is more: it would make her boy the heir. And you will put him in her hands, our little delicate boy, our little darling, poor Frogmore's little Mar! Oh, vicar, speak to him. Oh, Agnes, say something—don't let them throw little Mar's life away!"

"I can only say," said the vicar, shuffling about with his large feet, "that we're Lady Frogmore's parents, and the child's guardians by—by nature. I can't see what there's more to say."

"It's clear that I can hear no more," said the lawyer; "it's painful to see such animosity. Still we know what ladies are. Had anything been necessary to show how impossible——. But there never could have been any question of such a thing," he continued sharply. "Mr. Hill, you ought to be enough a man of the world to see that the mother's parents have nothing to do with the matter. Why, it's ridiculous. The mother herself is no more than a sort of accident. What I've got to think of is the Parkes, the family. It is astonishing you don't understand."

"Mr. Blotting," said Agnes, "my mother perhaps went too far. We don't want to show prejudice. Still the child is a delicate child—and he's been used to us all his life—to me, at least—I've been the same as his mother," she said, with the tears in her eyes. "I know all he requires—their treatment might be dangerous for him. Don't take him from us until he's older and stronger. I don't ask anything unreasonable. Mrs. Parkes, I don't doubt, would be—very kind: but she's used to robust children—and little Mar is so delicate."

"She is pleading as if it was a favour," cried Mrs. Hill, "as if we had no right——"

"You had better, both of you, leave it to me—leave it to me," said the vicar. "I'll talk it over with this gentleman, as a man of the world. My dear, you can go and look after Mary. That's your business. Leave me to talk it over, like a man of the world." The vicar was pleased with that appeal to his superior wisdom. He wanted nothing so much as to get rid of the ladies and bring Mr. Blotting to a due sense of the situation, man to man.

"Sir——," Mrs. Hill began; but Agnes, too, was against her. She caught her mother by the arm.

"Oh, father is right," she said. "Let us go to Mary. I never know what she may be doing when we leave her too long alone. It is not good for her to be long alone."

The house through which these two ladies made their way upstairs had changed in the strangest way. It was not neglected or out of order, nor had it the deserted appearance, as if life had altogether ebbed away from the forsaken sitting-rooms, which often shows the presence of death, throned in a remote chamber, and making an end even of family meetings. Mr. Upjames at the head of affairs took care of that, and as John Parke and his wife were expected in the afternoon, there were fires in all the rooms, and everything ready for the visitors, who were felt by all the household instinctively to have so much risen in importance. The decorous silence, which was proper to a house "in trouble," reigned, however, up and down. The servants glided about like mutes, stealing noiselessly out of sight, or flattening themselves against the wall when by chance they encountered "one of the family;" and the discipline was such that not a voice or a laugh betrayed from behind the swing doors the existence of a number of young servants, who, however impressed by the circumstances, could not be overcome with grief. The feeling in the house, it must be allowed, was in favour of the visitors who were expected rather than those who had arrived. The Hills were "the other side" to the retainers of the Parke faction. They saw through the vicar's bulk and solemnity, and they were aware by instinct that the old lady would be hard upon servants, and keep an inquisitive eye upon their shortcomings. They were, therefore, though perfectly civil, not anxious in their service to my lady's people. My lady, herself, poor thing, the servants were half afraid of, half sorry for. They thought she might have another attack at any moment. The women shrank back upon each other when they attended to her rooms or answered her bell. The maid whom she had brought with her was even more alarming than herself, a mad nurse who knew all about the things that were done to lunatics, though she put on the aspect of an ordinary lady's maid. Thus poor Mary, who had been so kind to them all, who was so gentle and so soft-voiced, sympathetic with everybody, was a sort of bugbear in the house from which she had been

banished so long, to which she had returned so strangely. And all through this great silent house there was a thrill of uncertainty, nobody knowing what was to be done, or what the new *régime* would be. The little lord in the nursery, poor little delicate boy, who would never be "rared," as all the country people said, who was a child of old age, with madness on one side of the house, whose father was dead and whose mother denied his existence: and the poor lady shut up in her rooms, in her grief and widowhood, with the maid who was nurse, and the mad-doctor hanging about ever watchful, not leaving her long out of his sight—the troubled group who hung about her, and about the child, yet had no real right there, and might be put to the door by the executors any day—made up a miserable family—a disturbed, uncertain, uncomfortable, little community—not knowing what was to happen. The only one in the house who was calm, who feared nothing, was Mary herself, in her retirement, half cured of her madness, full of gentle sorrow without anguish, and ignoring altogether in a strange bewilderment of nature all the dangers and miseries amid which, the most innocent of unconscious sufferers, she was about to take up without protection or support the strange story of her life.

(*To be continued.*)

A Forgotten Episode of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth.

EXTRACTED FROM THE STATE CALENDAR.

By ELAINE A. SWIRE.

THE event I am about to relate took place in the year 1598, ten years after the defeat of the Invincible Armada. In spite of this crushing blow to his hopes, His Most Catholic Majesty Philip II., and with him the Jesuit party, were far from abandoning their designs on the English Crown. Plot upon plot was planned, and one after the other failed, chiefly because of the vigilant watch kept up by Cecil on the movements of the Roman Catholics, and also because in many instances the contrivers of the plots over-reached themselves. The conspiracy which forms the subject of this article belongs to the latter class. It ended in the arrest of numerous persons, and the death of the one chiefly concerned.

The origin of Edward Squier (or Squyer, as it is indifferently written) is buried in obscurity; but from a few chance references made about him, and from what he himself says in his confession, it is to be supposed that he was born in either Greenwich or London about the years 1557 or 1558, or perhaps even a few years later. His parentage is unknown, but he was most likely the son of a tradesman, judging from his circumstances in after life. All that he says of himself is that "he had lived in Greenwich for sixteen years, and been married for eleven, during which time he maintained himself as a scrivener." We can find no other clues to his family or relations; it is true that somewhat earlier reference is made to a certain Walter Squier, who in 1585 brought to Dartmouth from Lisbon information of the warlike preparations in Lisbon, from which we infer that the said Walter Squier was either captain or seaman of a trading vessel or privateer. And in 1587 a William Squyer was a member of the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers, but we are unable to connect these two in any way with Edward Squier.

The trade of scrivener was doubtless not a remunerative one,

and later on we find Squier acting as a deputy purveyor of the Royal stables, under Keys, two years before the latter's voyage with Sir Francis Drake. Although nothing is said about it, we gather that when Drake sailed for Portugal in 1589, to make his unsuccessful attempt to expel the Spaniards and restore Don Antonio, Edward Squier went with him; and, with the bad luck that seemed to pursue him, whatever he did, was taken prisoner by the Spaniards as a pirate, and handed over to the tender mercies of the Inquisition. Squier, as well as many others, was forced to swear allegiance to the Spanish king and to become a Roman Catholic. As a reward for his obedience he was promised his liberty, but discovered when too late that the holy fathers had no intention of fulfilling their promises until it suited their own convenience. After languishing some years in various prisons, in April or May, 1597, we find Squier and another convert, called Rolls, at the English Jesuit College in Seville. From this point the narrative is quite clear and precise, giving in many parts the most minute details. The principal of the Seville College was then an Englishman, called Walpole, well known in England as a most restless and inveterate intriguer, and as being utterly unscrupulous in his methods of carrying out his designs. The presence of his two countrymen seems to have animated his spirit of intrigue, and his fertile brain immediately conceived and planned the details of a fresh conspiracy to get rid of Elizabeth and place Philip II. on the throne of England. He selected Squier as his tool, which shows how mistaken even the keenest intellect may sometimes be, for Squier was not at all of the stuff from which conspirators are made. All through the narrative he stands revealed as a timid, cowardly, vacillating kind of person, whose courage could only be screwed to the sticking-point by the most superhuman efforts. Let us use Squier's own words to show how the ice was broken: "Seeing me sad, he (Walpole) demanded if anything troubled me. I answered, 'No; but my mind was in England.' 'Be of good cheer,' said he. 'You *may* come there, to the great joy and comfort of your wife and children.'" This was all that passed the first time, but Walpole must have dropped many hints as to his intentions in various conversations that followed, for one fine day we find the saintly man inquiring if "Squier could compound poisons?" "Whereupon," says

Squier, "I told him no, but that I had some skill in perfumes;" adding that he had read of a ball, the smoke of which would "throw a man in a trance and kill him." This method of putting people out of the way did not appear to suit Walpole, probably because its cruelty was not refined or diabolical enough. "That would be difficult," says he, and hints that "to apply poison in a *certain place* was the most convenient way." Squier again said that "he had no skill therein," and Walpole rejoined that "directions would be given him." The veil once dropped, Walpole seems to have discussed the subject daily with Squire; and having at length overcome the scruples and timidity of the luckless convert, he made him swear a solemn oath to poison the Queen and the Earl of Essex, administering the Sacrament at the same time, so as to impress on Squier the sacredness of his oath. Rolls, who also received the Sacrament, was ignorant of the plot between Squier and Walpole. He was to accompany Squier to England, having been chosen by the other prisoners as their deputy, to beg the Queen and Council to negotiate for an exchange of prisoners. The oath once taken, Walpole made it his business to see that Squier was kept in the proper frame of mind, and his constant reminders, promises and threats seem occasionally to have been resented by Squier in a feeble sort of way.

On one occasion, when the unlucky man was at confession, Walpole accused him of not meaning to fulfil his promise. "I protested to him that I verily meant to do it." Upon which, with cunning arguments and forcible words, the holy father laid before his penitent the danger he ran if he did not endeavour to the utmost to perform his oath. "Death was not to be feared," he said, "though it might be imminent. For what availeth a man to win the whole world and lose his own soul? If you do but *once* doubt the lawfulness or the merit of this act, it is sufficient to cast you headlong into hell!" The author of "Killing no Murder" could hardly have said more. Thinking that after such an exordium the wretched man was sufficiently abased and terror-stricken, Walpole raised him from the ground and, throwing his left arm round Squier's neck, made the sign of the Cross on his forehead, saying, "God bless thee and give thee strength, my son, and be of good courage. I will pawn my soul for thine, and thou shalt ever have my prayers, both dead

and alive, and a full pardon of all thy sins." It is refreshing to come across a priest who thus artlessly expresses his conviction that murder, in certain cases, is not only lawful, but a *merit.* He went even further, for on another occasion he promised Squier that should he carry out what he had sworn to do, he should be "a glorious saint in heaven!"

All through the numerous conversations with Walpole the natural cowardice of Squier is apparent. His affection for his family and the desire to see it again, combined, no doubt, with an intense hatred and fear of Spaniards and Jesuits and a longing to escape from Spain at any price, seem to have been the motives which induced him to accede to Walpole's proposals, and there is no doubt he would have been vastly grateful to any one who would have absolved him from his oath. When we add to this that he had no personal grievances either against the Queen or Essex, we can understand the storm of conflicting feelings which assailed the unhappy man. Walpole was far too clever not to detect all this and, while acknowledging to himself that he had made a mistake in his choice of a tool, did not allow Squier to see that he was distrusted. This distrust was, later on, to have the most fatal result for Squier.

In the course of the various examinations made by Sir John Peyton, Attorney-General Coke, Solicitor-General Heming, Francis Bacon and W. Waad of Edward Squier while he was a prisoner in the Tower of London, he made several contradictory statements as to the source from which the poison was procured. Not to weary the reader with minute details, which confuse without explaining, I will say, after carefully weighing what evidence there is, that it appears that Squier obtained from Walpole sufficient poison to be used for the Earl of Essex and received instructions both verbal and written as to the compounding of the further quantity required for the Queen. It will be remembered that in 1596 the Earl of Essex accompanied the Lord Howard in his expedition against Cadiz. On the return of the expedition Walpole's powers of diplomacy secured for both Rolls and Squier a passage to England in Essex's own ship. Details as to how this was managed are not forthcoming,* but we

* Walpole probably arranged it with William Alabaster, chaplain to Essex on the Cadiz expedition: he became a convert to Rome, but afterwards returned to the Church of England and was rector of Thirfield, Herts, and D.D.

can easily imagine the plausible romance, half-fact, half-fiction, that would be woven by Walpole's ever-ready tongue. However that may be, the fact remains that they embarked on the earl's ship, and when the vessel was somewhere between Fayal and St. Michael, "armed with a thick glove for the safeguard of my hand," Squier proceeded to rub the poison (which seems to have been a kind of paste) on to the earl's chair, "*where he was used to sit*," thus explaining Walpole's remark about "applying poison to a *certain place*." The chair stood "under the spar-deck, where the earl was used to dine and sup. I did this of an evening a little before supper-time . . . Soon after, the earl sat in the chair all supper-time." The dastardly attempt evidently had no result, and my own opinion is that Squier was intensely relieved to find that it was so, although secretly dreading the time when he would have to tell Walpole of the failure. The voyage ended without any further trials of the "confection" and Squier found himself once more in England. Nothing is said about his wife or children, but it will do us no harm to suppose that they were all alive and well. Soon after his arrival Squier was reinstated in his former appointment in the Royal stables, and had not the remembrance of his oath been ever present with him he would no doubt have been quite happy and comfortable. Day after day passed and the evil deed was deferred, Squier arguing with himself that he was quite justified in putting it off as Walpole had expressly told him to wait for a fitting opportunity. In this manner a whole year passed, and Father Walpole, who all this time was anxiously waiting for tidings of his grand plot, could hardly contain his rage and fury at the thought that *he* was betrayed by his tool. And still as no news came his wrath increased, and a plan of revenge took shape in his mind, so subtle, so cunning, so diabolical that no one but a Jesuit could have thought it out. He determined to send over two more Englishmen, Roman Catholics and probably "converted" prisoners, to England, with orders to accuse Squier of the design to poison the Queen and the Earl of Essex, knowing that the punishment for such a plot would be a terrible one. His fury at having been duped as he thought by the man he had meant to use was even greater than his anger at the abortion of his conspiracy, and for the moment the thirst for revenge swept all other considerations out of his mind. Two men, called William

Monday and John Stanley, were selected to act as Squier's accusers. But having made their accusation, they as well as the accused parties (Rolls having been denounced as an accomplice to the plot) were thrown into the Tower, a chance which had not been reckoned on by Walpole. But Cecil's sagacity was too great not to perceive something curious about this sudden and gratuitous accusation of two apparently quite innocent men, and he determined to sift the affair to the very bottom. William Monday, who was examined on the 3rd of November, 1598, by Peyton, Coke, Heming and Bacon, tells us "that between last Whitsuntide and Midsummer I was in the hall of Thomas Fitzherbert at Madrid. He came in from Father Cresswell * in a great rage and said that Rolls and Squier were villainous rascals to deceive the Catholic King and undo us all as they had betrayed a number of godly priests in England and exposed all their secrets."

It is impossible to discover whether Squier had received any hints of the purpose for which Monday and Stanley had been sent over; but it would not be at all far-fetched to assume that such was the case. At any rate, a few days before his arrest, Squier really carried out his long-deferred design to poison the Queen. At that time an expedition was being fitted out for the West Indies, under the leadership of the Earl of Cumberland. Squier sought and obtained an appointment on board one of the ships belonging to the expedition, and having thus, as he thought, secured for himself a safe retreat, he proceeded to execute his nefarious deed. We will tell it in his own words: "On the Monday after I had obtained leave to go with the earl to sea, understanding that Her Majesty's horses were preparing for her to ride abroad, as the horse stood ready saddled in the stable yard, I went to the horse and in the hearing of divers thereabouts said, 'God save the Queen,' and therewith laid my hand on the pommel of the saddle and out of the bladder, which I had made full of holes with a great pin, I poisoned the pommel, it being covered with velvet, and soon after Her Majesty rode abroad." The deed was done, but too late to save the poor wretch from the pitiless clutches of the Jesuit. In a few days both Squier and Rolls, as well as their accusers, Monday and Stanley, found themselves in

* Father Cresswell or Cressey was the head of the Jesuit College in Barcelona.

the Tower. In a letter written by John Chamberlain to Sir Dudley Carleton, the English Ambassador in Holland, on November 8th, 1598, we find the following sentence: "Stanley, Rolls, Squier and the rest are to be arraigned to-morrow. Very foul work is said to have been attempted by them." In another letter written by one Richard Bayley, apparently a Roman Catholic, to Sir William Stanley, whose own loyalty does not seem to have been above suspicion, we learn "that the poor souls have been sore racked," which might account for the contradictory statements in the different confessions. Had the poison been successful, Squier had instructions from Walpole to make his escape into Norfolk, and to go to the abode of a Mr. Woodhouse, of Beccles, who was to direct him to one Upton, another Jesuit, from whom he would receive Walpole's further instructions. Squier had evidently not the faintest intention of obeying this order and arranged instead to go to sea, as being much the safest place. Walpole had assured Squier "that the poison would soon do its work," and that "after the act was done the Spanish fleet should come, being then in readiness for that purpose." But for once the holy man had been too clever, and Squier's accusation by Walpole's own people burst the bubble; the Spanish fleet stayed where it was and queen and earl were none the worse for the "confection." Squier, poor wretch, having confessed all he knew, protested his penitence, was condemned to death and *quartered.* It is most interesting to note the chance phrases here and there which give an insight into the ceaseless plotting that was carried on amongst the Roman Catholics in England as well as in Spain, and the little remarks which show that Squier disliked the Jesuit, who was his ruin, as much as it was possible for a man of his feeble character to do. For instance, Walpole tells him "to insinuate himself into the company of the better sort." Squier rather sulkily replies, "That it did not agree with his estate to keep much company." "Tush!" says Walpole airily, "let Dr. Bagshaw* but see your intent, and be assured of your resolution, and your wants will be supplied." John Stanley, in his confession, says that Squier had received 1,500 crowns from Walpole to start with. In one part of his examination Squier mentions the magnitude of the Spanish preparation for another descent on England, alleging that "The

* Christopher Bagshaw, of Derbyshire, a zealous Roman Catholic and a doctor of the Sorbonne.

King's command was to set all mills and ovens at work for bread to be procured forthwith." He also mentions having seen a map of England with all the places suitable for landing marked on it, and states that this said map "was said to have been given to the Spaniards by Sir William Stanley." We get a curious and amusing account of the compounding of the poison. Two drams of opium and five of mercury water were bought at an apothecary's shop in Paternoster Row, "towards the further end near Dr. Smith's shop." A third ingredient was procured at "The Plough, Bucklersbury," and the two others in Newgate Market. After being mixed, the compound was set in the sun "in the window of my house at Greenwich" for a specified time. Some of it was applied "to a whelp belonging to one Edwardes, of Greenwich, and I never saw it after; therefore I think it died thereof." Unless, however, the poison acted differently on the dog to what it did on the Queen and Essex, the chances are that the dog was still trotting about Greenwich when poor Squier was being quartered on Tyburn Hill.

By an entry made in 1601, we find that two of the participators in plot and accusation were then still in prison. I think we may safely conclude that they were Monday and Stanley, as Rolls was ignorant of the whole affair and doubtless succeeded in proving his innocence, a feat more difficult to accomplish in those days than it is in our time. The various persons who figured in this episode are mentioned more than once by John Chamberlain in his letters to Sir Dudley Carleton. In one epistle he says: "The Imperial Count Arundel is in keeping of Dr. Herbert on account of communications had with Stanley on his arrival." Such is the story of a plot that failed. Had it been successful, and had everything gone as Father Walpole hoped and planned, the English history of the last three centuries would have been very different to what it is.

The Street of Death.

A LEGEND OF FLORENCE.

PART I.

"MARRIAGE without love, if you will, but not love without respect," said the contessa to me, as we turned the corner of the Via Ricasoli and saw before us the vast shadowy pile of the Duomo, half-touched here and there by some brilliant flash of moonlight.

The contessa is beautiful, and as charming as she is beautiful—dark eyes and clear white teeth, and a face that ripples over with every passing emotion. Her age? Well, you might call her twenty-five, but I suspect that thirty years may be nearer to the mark—the age, at any rate, when a woman such as her has the fullest power of attraction, when she has penetrated all the pleasure of life, and yet has touched something of its inscrutable mystery and pain.

We had been together to the *Teatro Nuovo*, to see La Duzé in her creation of "*Amore senza Stima*," and when we left her box my friend had sent her Signore Conte off to supper with some of his acquaintance, had dismissed her carriage that awaited her at the entrance, and had availed herself of my escort to walk home across the Ponte Vecchio to her old palace in Oltr' Arno.

"Marriage seems to me in itself to imply a contradiction," I had answered, replying more to the first part of her remark than to the second; "it is like yoking winged Pegasus to some heavy lumbering plough, or seeking to turn that laughing Faun of the Campidaglio into a starched and respectable member of society.

"To come to a more prosaic setting, the idea of marriage, as we conceive it in these days, implies two conceptions, which are often very far from identical: the idea of love—a heavenly dream, a sentimental folly, a desire of the senses, an union of the soul—call it as you will, but which is in any case a *reality*, since mankind have never ceased to acknowledge its power; and then, tied up with this vague, this unfathomable, this overpowering passion—a social contract, sanctioned and impressed by the force of general opinion, by which two individuals agree to unite

their future under certain express legal conditions, which are to be binding for the rest of their natural lives.

"In some countries, indeed, the one side of the picture may be more in the foreground than in others; in France, for instance, they look more at the side of the legal contract, and arrange society so that, this once admitted, both parties may enjoy their liberty afterwards within—or without—these limits. *Chez nous*, in my dear England, we aim more loftily at the ideal of a marriage of affection, but our law-courts have too often to announce a dismal awakening to 'realities, which you may be sure in twenty cases to one had been more wisely kept from record."

We had turned the corner of the piazza as I spoke these words, and had passed into the full view of the newly-finished façade of the cathedral: in the clear moonlight it shone out like a polished jewel in its brilliant marble radiance, and the figures of saints and angels that crowd its portals seemed to stoop forward in love and blessing into the silent night.

Before us rose the Campanile of Giotto, climbing towards the stars like a fair white lily, with a beauty pure and perfect that is all its own; a few lamps shone flickering down the Via Calzaioli, and far off in the distance we heard the sound of voices and the touch of a guitar.

My companion was silent a moment, leaning on my arm as she looked into the beautiful night; then she said:

"You speak like a sceptic, *caro mio*, and a sceptic as to love, the coldest and most cruel of all scepticisms. To punish you for these your sins I have mind to tell you of an old story of my city, the scene of whose tragedy was this great white cathedral and the little street that debouches there, dark and mysterious—the 'Street of Death,' it has been called, the '*Via della Morte*,' that runs close beside the church of the Misericordia."

We had paused for a moment while she spoke, and then, moving along the little passage that separates the Campanile from the cathedral, leant against the railings that pass along its side. At midday the piazza is bright with sunlight and crowded with flocks of nestling pigeons, that often sweep round the pinnacles of the cathedral and fill the whole space with the rustle and glimmer of their moving wings. But now it was all silent, full of darkness and mystery, seeming to envelop us with the

great marble walls of the cathedral, where we stood, looking across to the entrance of the street that she had named.

She leant her jewelled hand on my wrist, and, in her rich passionate voice, with its accent of purest Tuscan, she began at that moment the old Florentine story.

"Long ago, in those dim days of the Trecento, when Florence rang with the steel of warring factions, when the Buondelmonti and the Uberti reddened that marble pavement with their blood, yet when the forces of the future were already striving within the strict limits of dominant Catholicism, when the verse of Dante and the prose of Boccaccio gave its first impulse to Italian thought, as the paintings of Giotto or Simone Memmi its first awakening to Italian art, Ginevra degli Amieri lived with her parents in their old *palazzo* behind the little church of Sant' Andrea in the Mercato Vecchio. You know our Mercato Vecchio, without doubt, my friend?

"Many a time you must have wandered through it, perhaps on a market morning, and have paused to watch in the narrow streets the noisy, chattering crowd, the dark-eyed, swarthy peasants, the women with their coloured kerchiefs setting off their oval faces and their clear milk-white teeth, and behind, in the great square, the line of empty deserted houses, their walls daubed with rich, fantastic pigments, from which the inmates have been ere this expelled. You know all that, without doubt, as well as you know the little demon of bronze, all talons and claws and strange twistings of form, that Giovanni Bologna caught one morning as he was flitting over his favourite haunts, and fixed for ever hard by there at the corner of the wall, just ere you come to the Palazzo Strozzi; you know it all, I am sure, and have often lingered there on some crisp winter's morning and been swayed hither and thither by the busy moving crowd, and lived with their life and shared for the moment in their hurrying eager passions. Yet perhaps, though you know all this, you do not yet know the little church of Sant' Andrea, the quaintest, quietest little shrine of departed memories, that stands back, apart from all the busy marketing of the Piazza, and seems to have dreamed on, undisturbed, since those far-off days of the Trecento.

"And here, without doubt, Ginevra had often knelt—here beside the little dim altar where the fresh lilies of the spring-time enshrined some quaint Byzantine portrait of Our Lady, she had

heard the solemn intoning of the morning mass, the rustling of the priest's heavy golden robes, and the rush of the censers through the air as they filled the whole building with their fragrance, rich, overpowering, carrying away the senses into some faint mysterious rapport with the unseen.

"Perhaps, in that moment, another dream came to her of a nearer, more earthly sweetness; perhaps the first roses of the summer mingled their crimson in her wandering thoughts with the pure paleness of the lilies that were before her, and lent something of their colour to the blush that came, quick and softly, into the golden olive of her rounded cheek?

"Or was it the memory of that stranger who but yesternight had met her unobserved in the riot and merriment of the masque, whose dark eyes had looked with such passionate pleading into her own, whose voice had spoken to her the first, the coveted words of love?

"Yet what folly to let her thoughts thus wander to that unhoped-for and yet hopeless dream! What were his beauty, his strength, his passion to her, clasped in the relentless arms of a narrow caste?

"Too well she knew the fierce pride of her kinsmen, the narrow oligarchy of blood that would exclude every foreign element from its presence, that would stamp out all life and liberty beneath its brutal heel; and then—as the hot, bitter, passionate tears rose into her eyes—with a sob of despair she knew that Antonio Rondinelli could never hold her for his love.

"Her thoughts are broken by the clang of the great bell outside, by the peal of the organ that announces the closing service; she rises from her knees, and, beckoning her trusted maid, she wraps her cloak closely round her, and prepares to leave the church.

"Yet, as she rises, what is the thrill that passes through her, as she sees that form, closely muffled and masked, watching her intently from a pillar near? The mask is moved, and she sees—yes, it is her lover of the last night, his eyes bent on her own with a deep and questioning gaze.

"That was a short and hurried interview, yet how full of sweet memories to them both! A few broken, whispered words of love, of reproof, of pleading, a meeting perchance implored for that evening beneath the safe shadows of the great cathedral, a promise half given and half retracted, a passionate glance of farewell,

and they were parted; yet within two hearts there lived that day a golden memory, making all life seem richer and more radiant for its presence, a golden hope, that merged all the present into the earnest of future sweetness.

"Ah! sceptic that you are, was this, then, such folly?

"Is this, then, naught but vanity that makes a heaven when the dear one is in your presence, a weary cold existence when she is withdrawn—that gives to these mere trifles, the glove that she has worn, the note that has been perfumed by her hand, something that is real and living, that touches your heart with an exquisite melody, like the music that men once heard angels make, singing into the still night of a southern winter?

"Nay! I know you then better than yourself, and when you would say such words it is not you I seem to hear, the dear poet and dreamer that I have loved, but some echo of this flat and empty century, of its vain philosophies and nausea of restless seeking after gain."

"Who could resist such a pleader, contessa," I answered, looking into her beautiful eager face, that even in the dim half-light seemed illumined by the passion of her words, "or who could interpose the cold fiat of reason beside your rich living images of passion and romance?

"Yet spare me for a while, ere you drive me to terms, and let me but hear the conclusion of your story.

"I seem to see already the secret meeting beneath the shadows that close us round, the passionate words of love and longing, the masked figures of the Amieri in midnight ambuscade behind yon projecting cornice, the clash of steel or the gleaming dagger that is stealthily raised, and then—the lover lying here in that bright patch of moonlight, a yet warm and bleeding corpse, the girl hurried away, thrust into some chilly convent, her rich life and love crushed into a cold blank of formal devotion: is that something of the sequence you have waiting me in this Florentine tale of yours?"

"Not so, my friend," she answered, "you have wrongly guessed my riddle; the sketch you give me has many attractions, but this weak point only, that it is not *my* story.

"And yet, I shall not linger over that meeting if it ever took place, nor over the others which certainly were contrived; I shall not linger over the long months of weary waiting, of hopeless

longing, at last of horrible despair. For between them rose as an inseparable bar the difference of their rank, a bar which in these days of democracy has lost perhaps something of its force, but then was overpowering and merciless—a bar which the girl's obedience to her parents, the long habitude of years of deference to the close ties of family, made her loth to break.

"And then—some mistake of her careless servant, some spying eye upon their meetings—I know not what—but the secret of their love is discovered. She is kept within the palace, a closely-watched prisoner, and he, without, left with no message or knowledge, lives as men live when they have lost what is dearest to them, when the springs of life and action have been removed.

"Then, too, the family took counsel on her fate: she must be married, and that speedily, lest these foolish, girlish sentiments lead her back to her folly.

"Is there not Francesco Agolanti, a man of blood and lineage worthy to share in that of the Amieri, advanced a little, perhaps, in years and somewhat stern of temper, yet all the better indeed for that to guide and govern this wild, wandering dove of theirs?

"Ah! how she struggled, poor dove, caught within that cruel cage, against the fate they planned for her; how she vainly begged and implored for pity, for delay; how, when all was useless, she vainly wept through the long bitter nights in her silent chamber, as the pressing reality came nearer and more near.

"'Ah! dear Mother of God,' she had cried, kneeling before the little image where the night-lamp dimly burned, clad only in her silken vest of white, with her loose hair all tumbled about her beautiful tear-stained eyes; 'dear Mother, hast thou no pity, thou who hast loved and suffered, through whose own heart the cruel sword has passed?

"'To lose my loved Antonio—never to see him more, to hear his voice, to feel his kisses on my cheek, to long for him vainly, vainly, day and night, is not that enough?

"'But spare me this more horrible torment, to give myself to this man, whose touch, whose very presence, has become hateful to me—to yield all that should be my dearest's and his alone to one whom I detest.

"'Ah, how may I live through this sacrilege, this profanation of all that is most sacred in my being? How can I believe the

counsel of my parents, the reproof of even my mother, the injunctions of the holy priest himself, that obedience is full of blessing and of peace?

"'But it is not full of blessing, but full of loathsome profanity, of foul and hideous thoughts. Horrid forms press round me; my life is seized by doubt and misery; justice and right seem to turn into but mockery and madness.

"'Ah, men! men! men! within your narrow systems of right and wrong all seems false and fickle and foul, yet surely my heart whispers me that somewhere beyond the far clouds there is a God of Justice and of Truth, that somewhere even here there might be a life in which reason and religion were at one with the deepest cravings of my being?'

"Shall I detain you longer over this horrible spectacle—the frightful analysis of a soul and body thus outraged and abandoned by man and his Church?

"For it is by the Church, with its formal ministrations, its mockery of blessing, that this vile compact is to be accomplished.

"See the stately procession, the retainers of the two great families assembled, the solemn music, the richly-robed priests, all the gorgeous ceremonial of religion.

"And society will coldly turn its back on the woman who in some moment of passion has listened to the voice of love, and does not see that such an union as this was yet the deeper profanity.

"For Ginevra had yielded, wearied out with suffering, with physical exhaustion, with the pressing reiterated commands of her parents: the wedding was hastily accomplished—and then, month after month, year after year, she lived on like one whose deepest source of being had been snapped, dying as it were by inches every day.

"And so it happened, that at length, some four years after her wedding, she fell into what seemed a deep sleep, but a sleep so sound that no wakening was possible, that her pulse ceased to beat or her breath to come again, and that she was laid out in her coffin with white flowers about her hair, looking herself most like some fair pure lily, so white, so cold, so still was she.

"Then her body was taken in great state, as became a lady of the Agdanti and a daughter of Bernardo degli Amieri, to the Duomo for its burial, and there with weeping and prayers was

laid in the vault of her family; and among those who followed were many who had known her in her happy youth, and perchance some who blamed her cruel marriage. But not among these, we may believe, were her husband or her father, hard men and stern, whose love and pity lay locked with the stern laws of their caste."

PART II.

"AND it came to pass at midnight, when all was still within that horrid vault, that Ginevra awoke to life; for this was not death that had seized her, but a deep trance, caused by the weakness of her body and the sufferings of her mind; and behold, she was wrapped all about her face and body with loose white grave-cloths, and pressed into a coffin, whose lid was close upon her face.

"Half-dazed and scarce knowing what she did, she obeyed her first impulse to free herself from this strange restraint, and, as she pressed upwards with her hands, the lid, which was not fastened, fell to the ground, and she stepped forth.

"Then she found herself in a deep vault, lighted only by a grating in the roof, and all scattered with coffins, and here and there with bones lying in the dust, the relics of men and women of her race; and among these hideous mementos of humanity a few flowers that had dropped from her coffin as she moved, lay, white and odorous, flowers of the early spring, a strange contrast to the death and decay around her.

"Slowly she sought her way, shuddering, up the steps at the side, groping with her hand against the damp walls, till she could push aside the door and enter the vast shadowy Basilica, that lay, mysterious, wrapped in gloom, with some faint gleams of light from the outer windows, and still, so still that no sound met her ear save the crash of the heavy door that slammed behind her and woke some strange confused echo that muttered hoarsely round the building and then sank again into a dead silence.

"Sometimes I have wandered in there at even—into this old Duomo of ours—just as the sun had set and the shadows were darkening, and then I have seemed most to feel the beauty and the mystery of the place; for then the growing darkness made the great spaces of the roof and the vaultings of the Dome seem yet vaster and more terrible, and the old spirits of saints and

heroes that had been buried there, and whose tombs lined the walls, unseen in the darkness, seemed to fill the great building with their presence, impalpable, indefinable, yet felt by the seeing spirit.

"For, indeed, between the dead and the living perhaps no such barrier exists as in our coarse common life of daily needs we might suppose; and there, kneeling before the altar of Madonna, a little space of wondrous light and colour in the encircling gloom, I have felt their presence near, and have seen their shadowy forms hover round me, pitying, sorrowing, sad with some strange incommunicable sadness of their love.

"For it is so old—this Duomo—so changeless and so old; after all these centuries of change and sorrow and passion, as beautiful and calm as when Ginevra entered that night into its darkness, with a great numbing horror at her heart.

"For all seemed dark before her eyes and before her mind. What were these strange wrappings of white about her body, these flowers wreathed round her hair, the dead bones mouldering at her feet, the vast shadowy expanse on which she looked? Was this then death that she now knew, or some strange mid-condition of the soul?

"Ah! how she had longed for death, and now that it had come how strange and terrible it seemed; how far off she had suddenly become from all those dear familiar things of her daily life, from her mother, from her memories of her lover, whom she had not seen for so long, whom she would never look on again with living eyes!

"And as she remembered him, slowly it all came back to her: the first meeting, the passionate embraces, the long agony of separation, the weary years of married life, the last illness, the weeping faces around her, the slow forgetfulness of all; and now—how far off it seemed, how she mourned over the weakness and selfishness of her life that was for ever passed away!

"For her husband had been just to her and kind in his manner, and had given her such love as was left to him to offer; and she, —ah! she saw it all now it was too late—she had all the while been dead and cold to his life, her soul locked up in a passionate memory and a passionate regret of the past.

"If she could go to him, could kneel before him, could tell him all, could let him see how it was that she could not love him

surely now that she was dead he would see it as she did, and would hear her without the anger she had dreaded. And in her half-dazed mind this became a fixed impulse, to seek him out and to tell him how she sorrowed for the past.

"Instinctively she groped her way through the silent church, waking faint echoes with her faint and feeble step; she turned slowly the great key that had been left within the side door, and came forth into the moonlight, a white spectral thing, with staring lustrous eyes and a pale cold face crowned with pale lilies, and about her body a white grave-cloth wrapped. Near where we stand she passed, looking less like a woman than a spectre of the night, and walked with slow feeble steps across the square, into that little street whose dark entrance we see from here, a mere mass of black shadow, called the 'Street of Death' to this very day, from the tale I tell you.

"Up the street she went slowly, past where is now the little church of the Misericordia, and then into the Via delle Oche, that runs at right angles to the Via Calzaioli—and so, step by step, scarce knowing what she did, she reached her husband's palace, where he dwelt in the Corso degli Adimari, nor in that dead hour of night did she meet any human soul upon her path. The great house lay above her, wrapped in darkness, closely barred and bolted against midnight marauders—one of those stern Florentine palaces, we may fancy, such as still survive in those of the Riccardi or Strozzi, more fortresses than dwelling-houses, with windows barred with iron, and torch-rests of solid iron set without.

"She raised the great knocker, the lion's head moulded in bronze, and smote with all the force that remained to her upon the solid oaken door.

"And there was silence for a while, and then lights half-glimmering above in one of the topmost windows, and the sound of confused voices, of steps that drew near from within.

"Then a voice cried to her, '*Who art thou, whether friend or foe, that comest at this dead of night, to a house of mourning and of death?*'

"And she answered, '*A friend, and one that knew and loved you well.*'

"Then she heard the bolts withdrawn, and the door was opened, and within she could see the old seneschal and the servants in the entrance, half-dressed and half-armed—a white sea of terri-

fied faces looking at her with horror and fear. And she cried bitterly, '*I seek not you, but your master, for my time is short, and I would bid him come to me quickly.*' And even as she spoke the servants gave way, and she saw him come near, armed from head to foot, with his great sword in his hand—and when he saw her he turned deathly pale, and shook with terror within his plated mail.

"Then she cried, 'Hear me, Francesco, and grant me thy pity and pardon; lest my soul live ever thus, restless, confined within this earthly prison, unable to soar up into the wider life.

"'For in my life I never prized thy love, and was dead and cold to thy embraces, and it is this thought that torments me even now.

"'Ah! why didst thou force me to wed thee, when I loved another, my first and only love, seeing my heart was ever set on Antonio Rondinelli, and that the soul and body are not two but one subtle essence, which lives with their mutual life, indefinable, strange, touched with the lips of the Divinity.

"'Yet I come now to forgive thee the great wrong thou didst me, perhaps not knowing, perhaps not seeing all that I see now, and to ask thy pardon and pity for me, a sinful soul, that stands now in the strict presence of the angels of God.'

"But as he heard her words, and heard her lover's name, a great hardness came over his stern face, and he cried fiercely to her, 'Faithless wife and adulterous woman! Thou hast wed me with the love of another in thy heart and hast dwelt with me four years with that passion in thy soul, and now thou art come to haunt me, a pallid, hateful ghost, as thy pale reproachful face was wont to haunt me in thy lifetime.

"'See, now, how I curse thee, and bid thee hence from my door! Get thee gone to where the hot fires of hell shall burn out thy unregenerate soul, that hast lived in unlawful desire within my house and by my side.'

"And as he spoke he set his mailed foot against the great door, that swung back on its hinges, and left her standing in the cold street without, shivering from head to foot.

"Then there was no pity for her, she thought, and no mercy from God or man. Oh, how weak she began to feel; how she longed for some word of love or kindness! Yet perhaps her father would receive her—would give her the pardon that she needed, that her weary soul might at length have rest.

"So she turned her way to the Mercato Vecchio, growing feebler with every step, stumbling over the rough pavement and bruising her cold naked feet; and at length she reached the old palace that stood behind the church of Sant' Andrea, where her happy girlhood had been spent, and she sank exhausted upon the steps, with just strength to raise her hand and beat feebly on the door.

"Then it seemed to her that after long ages of waiting the door was opened, and she saw faces that she knew within looking at her with terror and alarm—her father and her mother and the old nurse that had loved her so well.

"And she knelt at their feet upon the cold steps there, and cried, 'Oh, father and mother mine, I come to ask your pardon, in that in my married life I never loved Francesco, but my heart was altogether set on Antonio Rondinelli, my true and dearest love, and for that my soul is tormented now, and wanders restless, tied to this cruel prison of earth till it gain forgiveness.'

"But it seemed that they all drew back from her as from some foul polluted thing, and her father cried aloud:

"'Begone, faithless, evil woman, who hast lived in lawless and vain desires and hast broken the laws of God and man, the reverence due to thy parents' will, and the sacrament of Holy Church. Behold, I charge thee strictly that thy sinful spectre come no more to haunt this thy former abode.'

"And the great door was closed, and she was left kneeling and sobbing and praying for mercy, for mercy, lying on the cold steps without.

"And in her misery she bethought her of her uncle, who lived hard by, a kindly man and genial, who had loved her much as a child. Perhaps he would receive her, and let her rest in warmth and quiet, were it but for an hour, till this cruel fever that she felt to gain on her had passed away.

"Yet when she sought him and told him her tale he deemed her some spectre, and fled terrified, barring the door against her.

"Then in her despair she saw no hope indeed, since men had cast her from their homes and God would not yet receive her; and, very weak and weary, she wandered, not knowing where she went, through the narrow streets that surround the old

market, till she found herself in front of the cathedral, and sat there, sobbing and shivering with the strong fever that was on her, beneath the shelter of the little loggia that is at the corner of the Via Calzaioli—the loggia that is sacred to St. Bartholomew.

"And there amid her sobs she prayed:

"'Oh, God, Who art called the God of mercy, hear my prayer in Thy great mercy now, and since all men have cast me from their home, oh, do Thou receive me, and grant me a quick end to my misery in this death that is so long in coming!'

"And even as she prayed, a thought came into her mind—the thought of Antonio, how dear he had been to her and how faithful.

"For never since she had deserted him by that cruel marriage had he sought another woman's hand, but had been faithful ever to her dear memory. And then she thought—strange, confused working of the weary, broken mind—perhaps though the others all turned from her, he surely would not. And, scarce knowing whether she were alive or dead, she reasoned that if they disowned her and rejected her their claim in her was dead; that if her life were really past she was free—free to seek him whom she loved.

"Ah! was this life or death she felt, this horrible throbbing of her head, this shivering ague that shook her whole weak frame?

"She would seek him, she said to herself, and tell him all, and beg at least to know from his lips whether she lived indeed, or was some foul, sinful spectre, from which all good men turned away.

"How she found her way she never knew; but at length she saw an open door, and Antonio, her dear Antonio, standing in the entrance, older, perhaps, and sadder, but still the same loved face; and he looked at her with pity and sympathy in his eyes and bade her say what she sought from him in this strange hour and this strange attire—she whose dead body he had wept over the day before. Then she told him how she wandered from the tomb, and had sought her husband and her father and her uncle, and by all had been cast forth, shivering and weary, into the cruel night, and how she knew not rightly if she were alive or dead, or some horrid spectre that all good men should hate. And it seemed that she saw an immense pity in her lover's face, and a great deep love within his eyes; and that

instead of kneeling at his feet she found herself caught up into his breast, and heard his dear voice whisper in her ear, 'Darling, whether you be hated or beloved of others, whether you be alive or dead, through death and life I have loved you ever with my deepest soul, and I love you—I love you still!' Then a mist came over her eyes and a great warmth and peace over her frozen heart, and, as she sank back into unconsciousness locked in that dear embrace, she knew at length, she knew that she lived once more. . . . ."

"That is all my tale, my friend, or at least what remains will not take me many words to tell. For with care and tender watching Ginevra was restored in some few days to health of body and mind, and remained there with the man who had saved her life. And it is told that she refused to return to the husband and parents who had deserted her, and that she petitioned the tribunals of the Church, who decided in such matters, for a divorce from Francesco Agolanti.

"And this petition was granted on the ground—a strange piece of legal theology—that having once died and been duly buried she was free from her earthly ties and free to contract any new marriage. Then she married Antonio Rondinelli, and in her radiant life the memory of her past sorrows became in time effaced, or remembered only as giving a deeper colour to the happiness that now she knew.

"So that now my tale of this old city is ended—this dear old city that has grown so close to my heart.

"For with its present life are mingled all the quaint dear memories of the past, that have lingered on through the ages in these old familiar haunts, and reach us now with no jarring sense of discord when we pause within the scenes where the men and women of that far-off past have loved and suffered.

"And if I would seek an image of the charm which Florence has over me, I would find it best—but do not mock at my strange analogy—in one of her old palaces; such as is the great Palazzo Strozzi, that frowns on us still in its massive strength of hewn-out marble and solid oaken gates and close-barred windows, as we pass down the Tornabuoni on some morning of spring-time.

"And beneath, on the steps, country women are selling flowers

—great masses of lilies and carnation and jessamine—and children are playing, and a fair-haired girl, perhaps some pretty Inglese, is laughing and setting the violets of the sweet season in the bosom of her dress. The contrast of that stern palace of the Trecento, untouched in all these years—speaking of the strong, narrow faith, the intense loves and hatred, the fierce vendettas of the day when it was built—and beneath it of this our modern life, cosmopolitan, restless, perturbed, seeking ever some new and fleeting form of culture, some diverse aspect of religion, some vaster and greater scope of progressive humanity—is what most touches my inner sentiment—is what has lingered most in my heart when I have been far away in London or in Paris.

"But see, the moonlight begins to pour into the piazza and to touch even the dark entrance of the Street of Death, and the night-wind is growing chilly, and my Paolo will be awaiting me at home.

"Let us walk homewards, and tell me, as we go, what you think of the old legend of Boccaccio that I have tried to bring back to life for you in the half-hour we have spent beneath the shadows of the Duomo."

"I think," I answered her, as we turned away and left the shadowy piazza where I had listened for so long to the music of her rich southern voice, waking old memories and dreams that I thought had long since passed out of my life—"I think, contessina mia, that such love as this that you have told me was worth all the sorrow and suffering; beautiful as the dawn of summer's morning, strong and yet stronger than the cruel presence of the grave. Yet not to all has that sweet vision of mutual trust been given; and there be some who, thinking they had grasped it, have found it slip away from them in life's complex currents, or have found—most cruel mockery of all—that its dear hope was but a cold deceit and its fruition the ashes of a vain regret. It is for them I would reserve my saddest sympathy, and feel for them the deepest pity."

SYDNEY CURWEN.

Weighed and Found Wanting.

DAN BELLAIRS and Lia Bellairs had done a very foolish thing—they had fallen in love; they had done an awful thing—they had married. And married on the strength of unlimited credit on the Bank of Love, and almost a total blank on that of Threadneedle Street. The cheques of the former are not negotiable in a matter-of-fact world. Then Dan and Lia, scouting the maxim that two is company and three is none, smiled welcome on a baby. All this took place in due chronological order when Dan was at the responsible age of one and twenty.

When he took the train (just after his marriage) down to Lessinger Hall to inform his father of the event, his stern parent told him to go to the devil, whereupon Dan replied, with over sanguine and rash cheerfulness, that he had come to his father, following his advice in advance. Mr. Bellairs did not see the joke (it was never his way to perceive any sort of joke) and then Dan got riled, and both men got cross (which was a pity) and used naughty words (which was worse), and each generously gave rather more than he took, and Dan proved himself a chip of the old block—much to the old block's indignation. The upshot of it being that Mr. Bellairs informed his son by letter that he had cut him off with a shilling and that if he chose to apply for the sum, the family solicitors were authorized to honour his cheque to that amount.

Luckily Dan had £120 a year independent of his father, so, by aid of hitherto undreamed of economies, the first two years passed, though it took Lia some six months to learn that salmon and grouse are not the cheapest fare to live on.

Dan had passed out of Sandhurst and had been gazetted to a Bengal Cavalry regiment, stationed somewhere in Oudh, but the troopship in which he was to sail did not start for six weeks. One day he burst into Lia's little sitting-room ("three pair back"), saying:

"Who do you think I've just stumbled against, Lia? You remember Jervois, don't you? Jervois of my company—tall chap

with a baldish head. Well, I'd just turned into Vigo Street when a fellow came knocking up against me. I growled out something about the Dickens, don't you know, and he turned round, and by Jove! it was Jervois!"

"How strange," echoes Lia, as if it were a freak of nature to meet one's friends in London.

"Jervois has no end of tin, lucky fellow."

Lia sighed dismally.

"We got talking of horses and he said he hoped we would let him drive us down on his coach for the 14th. What do you say, Lia? It would be a regular fling for once in a way. He gave me no end of a tip about Adkemar; swears he must win at a canter, and he advised me to lay all I had on him. Isn't it hard, now, that I can't?"

"How much?" begins Lia with hesitation.

He answers by routing out a two-shilling-piece from his trousers pocket and spinning it in the air. "Heads or tails? Heads? Heads it is. You've won. Next remittance doesn't turn up till the day after to-morrow," says this husband and father soberly after a pause. He goes to the window and looks out with straight brows and firm closed lips, and succeeds in looking grown up.

The fourteenth smiled on an anxious world which had feared a frowning tearful sky.

Arriving at the course, Dan and Jervois went off by themselves. The latter was a good deal excited. He had only lately come into his money, and the slipping of the leash was just a bit intoxicating. Dan followed, no less off his head. There *was* a chance of doing something, of achieving a host of things, inclusive of the reconciliation with the old block. With the money that he should win on Adkemar he would first buy no end of lovely things for Lia. She was bewitching enough as she was, but Lia in beautiful garments would melt the North Pole. Yes, he would do all that, and a whole heap of other things, including some awful swamping bills, hanging like so many sledge hammers over their youthful, inconsequent heads.

So Dan, having about as much weight on his boy's shoulders as would have sunk a grown man, followed his friend's lead, and knowing very little even of the technicalities of what he was doing, struck out blindly in his new course; shut his eyes like

most young swimmers, and consequently saw nothing of the breakers ahead. In fact the rush swept him clean off his feet. It is true he felt a bit sobered when he climbed up by unconscious Lia's side at luncheon time.

One or two men looked rather curiously at the young couple; they did not look as if the loss of money were of no consequence to them, and yet they had witnessed poor Dan's erratic career, which would mean something very serious if the horse he had backed did not win.

The race did not come off for an hour after, and, by that time, Dan had cooled rather, and he turned very white as he glanced at his note-book.

"And have you managed a bet or two, dear?" asked *insouciante* Lia.

"Yes, one or——"

Just then came the shout, "They're off!" Lia looked the more excited of the two, but then no one saw Dan's hands as they tore nervously at the lining of his pockets.

Adkemar and Scotia led throughout, and the game evidently lay between those two. Yes, and the game was played out, when Scotia shot ahead and won by half a length.

Lia turned round in sympathy for Dan's disappointment, but Dan had slipped down off the coach and was nowhere to be seen.

"I say, old chap, you're looking deuced glum—Adkemar's downfall, eh?" and Jervois clapped him on the back.

Dan turned round with a queer sort of rattle in his throat.

"Adkemar's downfall?" he said; "my own downfall, you mean."

"Oh! come now, not so bad as all that," answered Jervois cheerfully, not knowing for the moment half what his own or Bellairs' debts were; "not so bad as that, old fellow. I'm pretty well broke myself," he went on with that pleasant equanimity born of a knowledge that you're nothing of the kind, or that if you are, there is always a landing net in the shape of a soft and forgiving father to fish you out of all difficulties next day; "I'm pretty dead broke myself."

"Yes—you're—pretty—dead—broke, yourself," echoed Dan stupidly. "You're—pretty—dead——" He broke off with a start and caught himself up.

"Yes, indeed," continued Jervois amiably, "and I feel rather inclined to go and drown myself—there's a place nice and handy, built as a last resource for stonebroke turfites."

Dan stirred, and a curious awaking sensation crept through him—it seemed as if he had been asleep all this time, and had only awoke to hear Jervois' last words.

He looked far and away—far across and over the moving, mixed crowd(amidst which some special excitement seemed to be roused), over the green sweep of meadows till they blurred hazily into the blue—and he saw beyond all that far more than Jervois would have seen had he too looked. Yes; all hope of reconciliation with his father was done with and over—his commission was worse than useless to him. Such an overwhelming drowning wave was surging up to where he stood—a wave that would as surely engulf Lia and the child as well.

"By Jove! Bellairs is a whole sight younger than I am, for all that he's got a wife and baby—he can't take bad luck a bit," thought Jervois as he watched the beardless face, in perfect ignorance of the state of Dan's finances.

Dan's lips moved, but he had to moisten them before any sound came from them; they were awfully white and he shivered as if it hadn't been a blazing hot day.

"It's a pity Adkemar didn't come in first, Jervois."

"Pity? Pity's not the word—it's damnable, Dan, old man," with sympathetic gloom; "and then, oh, Lord! the paying up of it all."

An added pallor swept over Dan's face and *such* a look of sudden anguish shot into the boy's dark eyes that Jervois in pity turned his away.

"How do you stand, old chap—lost your all? Can I help——?"

"No," answered Dan slowly, and with the far away mist still in his eyes, "no, not all: I have Lia and the boy still—Lia——" A horrid sensation crept up his throat; in a woman it might have changed to sobs, but it only turned to a sharp pain that stabbed each breath as he drew it. His face gave a sudden twitch, and he passed his hand impatiently across it. It seemed hard that he might not possess even the manly right of restraining his feelings in public. He wheeled sharp round.

"Hallo!" shouted Jervois. "What's the row at the paddock? I'm off."

Dan went to the refreshment tent and called for some champagne. Half way through he put it down with the thought of "what an utter waste." Then he walked away.

A few minutes later Jervois rushed up to where Lia still sat.

"Mrs. Bellairs, do you know where your husband is? I've been looking everywhere for him. There's awfully good news for us—there's been something false in Scotia's weight. His mount has been 'weighed and found wanting' by several pounds; can't think how he managed it. There's no end of a row over it. Anyhow, Scotia is disqualified and Adkemar, of course, comes in best."

"I am so glad," said Lia sweetly. "Dan will be so pleased, as I think he bet some money on Adkemar," she added with a pretty absence of the usual professional slang. "Do go and find him and bring him to me, and let *me* tell him the good news, will you. *Do*——"

Jervois went off like a shot.

"I say, have any of you seen Bellairs?" he asked, addressing a knot of four or five men standing round the bar.

"Haven't the pleasure of his acquaintance. What is he like? Who is he? If he's a dark young fellow in a light overcoat, and has a fit of the blue devils on, I'm at liberty to state that your friend—Bellew? Bellairs?—has gone in the direction of the lake. Go, seek his corpse."

Jervois turned sharp round without a word and set off at a run. A run?—he dashed along at the quickest rate he'd ever gone in his life. He clenched his teeth and drew his breath sparingly. He knew pretty well the next few minutes meant life or death—and had he asked himself why he went the pace he did, he knew the answer would be an ugly one. The memory of Dan's hopeless young face as he had last seen it, and the thought of Mrs. Dan's unconscious happy one, sent the blood all gathering round his heart. He wondered whether he would come too late What a fool he had been to joke Bellairs about the lake.

* * * * *

And Dan's hat and stick lay beside his coat on the grass. And the boy himself? Well, it's the same with most things in

this world—Jervois had come too late and Dan was dead! His quiet face was very white and still and stern. Lying turned up there, it seemed like some dumb accusation flung up to its Creator, and the solemn light cast over it gave a look of age and dignity to the young handsome features. But not all Lia's kisses laid on his half-closed lids could make them open as in life, nor part the cold lips again. The dark eyes had an odd hopeful look in them, and the boy's mouth had ever so faint a smile, as if a kiss had just rested upon it. Was it as well that Jervois was too late?

H. S. BRODIE.

One Aspect of Eton Life.

By an ETON BOY.

OUR first impressions of people and places generally form the standard by which we subsequently measure our appreciation of them; time sometimes corrects and sometimes confirms these impressions, but still the mind loves to cling to its first impress. Realities are sharpened and toned down in proportion to our first feelings, and the mind unconsciously compares the knowledge of to-day with the misty but somehow sacred imaginings of a long past time. The painter daubs on his canvas a mass of colour that he knows to be unsightly and crude, but he knows as well that though the colder shadows will blot out that warm glow and hide it completely from sight, yet the colour will gleam out of the dusk and lend its mellow warmth to shades that without it would be hard and cold.

So it is with us.

But with merely abstract ideas it is different. We are only too prone to have nothing to do with old ideas, to think that age and experience must carry their own weight, and that the impression of to-day is on that account necessarily better than yesterday's. Nowhere is this principle better illustrated than at a public school. Habits of mind are changing day by day. What seems right this year is wrong the next; better acquaintance with every subject under the sun shows us the fallacy of some preconceived idea or other, and gradually we begin to distrust our own feelings of the moment and become readier and readier to take any course of action or thought which appears expedient, and is in some degree sanctioned by custom. I believe that this habit of looking at every phase of life proves the insurmountable barrier to many a public school career that otherwise would be entirely successful. What are its results? The boy who learns to distrust his old notions about things and to "limp in base imitation" after older thoughts and older ways, loses all his power of decisive action and prompt resource; he is thrown over, often at critical periods, and falls from a possibly high path of self-confident duty to run meekly at the heels of the crowd he has fancied himself unable to lead. In a word, he loses all originality.

No one need contend for a moment that only the untamed

flashes of an original genius can bring its possessor to great success in a public school; it is not often that originality of this type is found scattered throughout a generation, and when it is found it is generally joined to qualities that are not congenial to the majority. It is our object to show that with the rejection of spontaneous ideas and inborn convictions that have grown up with us from childhood—expanding as we have expanded, sometimes wrong, but always with this merit, that they have been part of ourselves and part of our soul, and as such more valuable as guides than the most elegant and exact of imported formulas—we lose not only our originality but all those qualities which go to form what may be called versatility.

Down in the depths of the coldest bog grows the asphodel; the tiniest, scantiest niche of sunny wall brings forth its golden clump of red-brown wallflowers; but the pampered exotic dies in the breeze that blows cheerily to June roses, and strained unnatural acquisitions can never take the place of spontaneous, natural convictions. The sun of originality has gone down, and the exotic bloom can only toil out a sickly withered existence; even the hardy wallflower can only live in the sun.

Perhaps the tendency just mentioned—to absorb alien ideas to the loss of individual character—is the chief reason why some seemingly promising public school careers come to nothing, or at any rate to less than might have been expected, not only in a restricted scholarly sense, but in the broader acceptation of the words, which includes all the training, athletic and social, which goes to form part of our life. And it cannot be disputed that the principles of our existence here at Eton all tend to foster rather than to minimize this tendency—it might almost be said that the basis of public school life created it; but even if this were altogether true, no hater of our system could presume to say that its evils in this respect are not infinitely of less importance than the evils which arise from the entire absence of the principles which govern a public school. It is not hard to see how such a tendency is inevitable in a large majority of cases; it is our object to prove that the boy who declines to fall into the ruck, who tramples on no orthodox customs and opinions, but who looks at life from his own standpoint, with his own thoughts and not other people's influencing his actions, and with choice unfettered in likes and dislikes—he is the one who draws the greatest good

from his school career, and it is he too who achieves the greatest popularity.

The other day two well-known men were discussing schools in general, and one of them asked his friend whether his son was popular at Eton. The other smiled and shook his head rather doubtfully. "No, I'm afraid not," he said; "he is a boy of some strength of character." And the man who made that seemingly cynical remark was no cynic, and knew quite well what he was talking about; he knew Eton, and his sentence, in a happy, epigrammatic way, went to the root—perhaps a little deeper than any root, though—of a side of our life which no genuine lover of the place can uphold in his heart, and which the professional school-hater seizes on with the tooth and nail of malevolent, unreasoning spite.

A public school is a leveller; its theories are the most absurd blending of extreme democracy and antiquated Toryism, but the ruling idea is the planing and smoothing off of bumps and excrescences. A great many have to be brought up to a level; a few no doubt are kept back from piercing beyond. Peers are sent over the town to buy "sock" for commoners; unwashen youths are gently reminded that cleanliness is next to godliness; swagger and priggery are alike abhorred; the laziest are compelled to take wholesome hard exercise; and vigour and earnestness in work and play brightens many a one into action and life that before seemed fitted rather for an asylum than a school. And along with these come the outward (it is only superficial) affectation of weariness, the hands-in-pocket slouch, the *nil admirari* expression and tone of voice, the numberless and wearying absurdities of an etiquette which one would have thought no healthy-minded boy would have cared to bother himself about, but there are grovelling spirits who think it worth while to persecute a comrade and effectually make his life a burden to him if he through mischance or forgetfulness, or even ignorance, violates some petty canon of lower boy manners.

Lower natures will submit to this; it will all soak into their composition; the iron enters into their soul only too readily, but those of stronger character will always rebel at heart, but they will seldom prove their foolishness by rebelling openly against trifles which only the youngest of feeble-minded lower boys cares to squabble about: *magno jam conatu magnas nugas.* Strength

of character, we opine, would be rather shown in disregarding the false notions which inspire such petty bigotry, but nevertheless in acquiescing in the absurdities which are their outcome. Thus the remark that strength of character is not always the best kind of mental dry-goods to parade openly at a school is true. Eccentricities are not in favour with most of us, and angles have to come off when the wheel turns and the pebbles roll over and over one another. But it is not essential to the being of a poet that he should wear long hair and a velvet coat, nor do naturally strong-minded boys on entering a strange world where they see scant favour accorded to priggery deem it therefore their bounden duty to run counter to the ideas of the multitude. Weaker vessels, it cannot be denied, succumb under the ordeal ; the outward appearance of these differs nothing from their brothers, except that the army of fops is as a rule recruited from their ranks, but the difference is mental. In some cases it takes the form of a contempt for intellectual pursuits and ambitions, and an utter distaste for them, and this usually amongst the cleverest ; in others it assumes the garb of premature manhood and apes the fashions of the conventional man about town, and flavours its conversation with strange oaths and horsey slang ; in others too often it roots up the lessons taught in a far-off childhood and learnt at a mother's knee, and casts them to the winds to follow after filthiness and evil talking and slandering, and all the seven devils who, unrestrained, would turn a public school into a hell.

But with these we have nothing to do ; these are not they who gain any kind of lasting good from the years they spend here. It is usual to say that success means popularity ; here it would be just as true to say that popularity means success, and though our cynical friend might emphatically deny such a statement, and though disappointed fathers may rave about the absurd position of athletics, by which, they maintain, with some show of reason, popularity at Eton can alone be secured—to the detriment of scholarship and the ruining of morals—yet we will even go further, and assert that strength of character leads to popularity.

And now we have raised a structure of argument, resting on two distinct and yet connected theses :

(1) Strength of character means popularity. (2) Popularity means success.

We do not think that the paradoxical appearance of these

statements will prevent our proving, at least to our own satisfaction, that they are not the ravings of lunacy—or even the unweighed words of a bigoted public school enthusiast, which in some people's opinion are much the same thing.

(1) Strength of character means popularity.

There are two types at Eton which achieve popularity, which have one point in common—namely, a certain proficiency in games, but which otherwise stand apart and distinct.

The first is the athlete, pure and simple—the boy who has made himself known as being distinguished either on the river, in the field or on the running-path, who as a rule wakes up one morning to find himself famous, and who is accepted as the hero of the hour. Sometimes his disposition on better acquaintance is found to be faulty, and he subsides, not into oblivion—his triumphs, and his position resulting from them, forbid that—but into the position which dulness, combined very often with offensiveness, naturally relegate him to. More often he improves on acquaintance, and makes friends with every one he meets.

The other type is not distinguished for athletics necessarily; we are discussing at present the average chances of strength of characters attaining to popularity at a public school, and, if the words have any meaning, it will be found that some of the boys of strongest character are in the first rank of athletics. This is a satisfactory coincidence, as we hope to be able to show, but it is not essential to our argument. How, then, do these people who are not particularly distinguished in any athletic branch come to achieve popularity? In the answer to that question lies the pith of the whole subject. Because they have some strength of character, and because this is not a mathematical proposition it is impossible to prove it conclusively, but I think every fact tends to show that such is the case.

It is not the boy who devotes all his energies to one pursuit, whether in work or play, who succeeds the best in the sense of drawing most good from his life here. In one case he will be recognized as an athlete, in the other as a distinguished member of Sixth Form, with the difference that a greater measure of applause is always reserved for the athlete, and popularity only takes for itself the very highest of those mentally endowed, whereas honours are showered upon a crowd of lesser athletic lights; this is only natural. But the boy who restricts himself

to one thing does not mix with the bulk of the school; he may be known and liked in his own set, but the very nature of his employments and the bent of his mind prevent his moving outside a limited circle. He can never achieve popularity; can he be said to have achieved success?

Education has been defined to be the process of learning something of everything, and everything of something. The everything of something may be there, but the something of everything is unheeded. Like the pebble, our school life makes us, if we will, *teres atque rotundus;* to draw the full benefits from its teaching we must know something of all its branches, and be in harmony with every varying side-current that flows beneath it. The youthful Pharisee who thanks God that he is not as other men are never achieves popularity; we do not think he ever achieves success in the highest sense of the word.

One constantly hears remarks much of this nature: "So and so? Oh, he's very popular, you know; in Pop and all that, but he's not done much as far as I can see!"

There is a shallow speciousness about words like those which captivates lots of people. Actions are often held to be the sole test of human greatness, and so they are up to a certain point; but there are many lives (I mean school-lives) boasting of few actions which are of more profit and better appreciated than those which point stolidly to deeds.

No one who has not learnt the feelings of every party and faction, who has not mixed with lower boy and Sixth Form boy, "sap" and athlete, opposed sects of every sort, and at the same time has not appropriated to himself the best views on each side and worked them into his own life, can be truly said to have made the most of his time here. It is thus that we gain originality; and nowhere is a rational originality more highly prized than at Eton.

And who does this? The athlete? He is on the river, and would jeer at you if you mentioned such nonsense. The "sap?" Not often; he is too much wrapped up in Greek particles to trouble himself about anything else, but sometimes he does. Then who? The boy of some strength of character—the boy who has not attached himself to a party, like a stamp is stuck on an envelope, there to stay for ever, but who has declined to sacrifice his originality and his own ideas on subjects at the beck of the mob—and in the earlier stages of his school life he gets into

hot water for this little peculiarity; but it brings its own reward at last, for it brings him a full appreciation of the merits of every line of thought and action in the school, as well as their defects, and only that appreciation, when athleticism is absent, can assure popularity.

Nor is it enough to travel through the length and breadth of public feeling, approving inwardly here, censuring inwardly there, but everywhere looking on with a smile of incredulous contempt for people who have stereotyped views on every subject under the sun. He must be all things to all men; with a smile for the fellow he considers a fool as well as a word for the fellow he thoroughly admires: this makes friends, and friends make popularity. It would be absurd to try and make out that popular people achieve their success merely because of a native "hail-fellow-well-met" sort of nature; popularity brings its enemies as well as its friends, and then skill is shown, not in increasing the number of your friends, but in decreasing the number of your enemies. This sounds brutal and mercenary, but it is plain truth: the simple, kindly-hearted boy is not the one to convert an enemy into a friend; he has not the brains; he runs the same chance of incurring odium by being popular without the power of turning his enemies' shafts into their own bosoms; it remains for the boy of some character to do this. How many friends—to use the word in its sacred sense—how many friends has the most popular of us? He can count them on the fingers of one hand: he has no more than the youngest "scag" in Fourth Form, whose very name isn't known to more than a dozen people.

We have only a limited capacity for the feelings which alone are worthy of the name of friendships. But how many acquaintances has he? Therein lies the difference between the known and the unknown; it is the talent of seizing the moment, of making an acquaintance by a chance word or a ready smile, of noting every phase of school life and applying it when occasion requires, of being handy with a bat as well as an oar, of being known to the world as neither a vehement athlete nor pronounced sap, but as an easy-going, pleasant fellow who knows a little of everything, can play any game on occasion, and doesn't give himself airs: this brings popularity.

A member of Pop is nearly always a member of the musical and of the literary societies; generally he is well up in

the school; he always possesses those gentlemanly qualities of readiness and resource which distinguish a man from a clown; he must have shown himself plucky and skilful up to a certain point in games; that is a *sine quâ non.*

But a fellow may be a very distinguished athlete and yet not be in Pop. Of course, because he is unpopular. But then why is he upopular? Not always because he is a blackguard or a cad—Eton happily turns out very few—but because he is not in sympathy with a large section of the school; he may possibly be the idol of a small circle, but that is not enough. In truth, it is because he has gone through life without looking at more than one side of a question; he has not learnt the tact which brushing against opposing bodies gives; he has not assimilated to himself the teaching which a school gives apart from its cut-and-dried book-learning; or else that he has allowed himself to fall into a groove and to engage so closely in one occupation as to exclude a knowledge of any other; and with the loss of knowledge he has failed to come in contact with people who might have given him ideas, and further still, this want of sympathy has in a great measure ruined his faculty for making friends.

But let no one imagine that successful toadyism makes popularity.

Out of the numerous temptations to toadyism which hedge a school about there is begot an instinctive shrinking from such a person that makes his footing very precarious; he is sometimes tolerated, never liked or respected, and a genuine feeling of respect is a larger factor in the composition of popularity than some people, whose knowledge of school-life is considerably smaller than they imagine, would ever give us credit for. For what constitutes the difference between the popular and the non-popular—I would not say unpopular? Outwardly there is none; it would require a strict mental analysis to discriminate between the two, and then the searcher would find in the brain of the popular fellow a little corner entirely devoted to "capacity for friendliness;" tact; thirst for knowledge of people; versatility; originality! If, then, strength of character means the power of remaining original and receptive where many causes are at work to drag mental culture and even ambition down to the same dead level, and of drawing good from not only one but every side of public school life, I think there can be no doubt that this strength of character is one of the most important, if not the

most important, factor in school popularity, and in this case it has been shown that strength of character means popularity; but there is a second and resulting clause to be considered which hardly admits of argument—namely, that popularity means success. We should imagine that the enemies of the public school system desire most for their sons that they should be intellectually distinguished, and consider that public schools, especially Eton, lay far too much stress on athletics and such-like nonsense, and that such training is a mere waste of time, if nothing worse.

Hercules unwittingly slew himself when he put on Nessus' shirt; such arguments are their own answer. If we compare the after lives of the members of Sixth Form and Pop during any given period, we shall find that by far the most distinguished names come off the Eton Society's books.

The numbers of the two bodies are almost equal: the one is the representative of scholarship and ambition, the other of popularity, and the qualities which go to form it. If some members of the one are also members of the other (as many of our most distinguished men have been) it is but an additional and most weighty argument in our favour, proving that the versatility and original power of such an one has brought him not only to the summit of mental ambition, but also to a goal which many more strive at, in which there is far more real competition, but which only he who has profited by his time, socially, and in all the little ways which are valuable at school, but much more valuable in the bigger world—tact, sympathy, and broad views—can ever hope to gain.

And so the proof of our second point comes to be merely a recapitulation of the old argument. If it is admitted that strength of character, and the qualities which we included in that form of words, can and does gain the best kind of popularity, it must follow that popularity means success, for no one is so bigoted as to be capable of asserting that school-life is meant for the exclusive acquirement of Greek roots and elegiacs; these may be very good things in their way, but our exhaustive knowledge of them is not all that is looked for in one who has spent five years at Eton.

And so popularity and success come to be interchangeable terms: popularity means success, because the qualities which

are necessary to ensure popularity are those which even a School Board examiner would allow, do carry with them the truest meaning of success. Beyond this stretches a very wide subject, as deep as it is wide; nor is it possible for the multitude to stand on the brink with a six-foot pole, and think they have reached the bottom. They only stir up mud. The question of an athletic supremacy has seemed an iniquitous and baseless injustice to generations of respectable people who wear tall hats on Sunday and call themselves Public Opinion; it is only necessary to touch on it here in so far as it affects the question as to whether popularity at school is a fair test of success. It has been shown that Pop—the goal of social ambition here—is not filled exclusively with those whose reputation is merely athletic, but has members whose success in public estimation has been won in other fields, or rather in every field, and from this we contend that it has been shown that versatility gains its own reward, and, by that very recognition proves its worth, but it is also true that the majority of Pop are there simply because they are good runners or good rowers, or good cricketers, and all good fellows.

Besides, it is true that when a fellow is elected to Pop he does nothing less than stroll into Jefferies' and orders up a bundle of canes—the peculiar prerogative of membership—canes with a good switch in them, canes that will curl and bend lovingly round the plastic form of the recalcitrant lower boy. "A relic of barbarism," you will say. Perhaps so, but a healthy one.

Schools are not the only institutions which still hold on to obsolete customs with a loving persistency that strikes prosperous stockbrokers as preposterous, if not worse; the mill-wheel sways round after the stream has been dammed up, and we still cherish our Pop-canes, even if they are seldom or never used in real life, and even if they offer in theory a glaring target for the arrows of petty misanthropists in practice.

People are too fond of thinking that the world is decently civilized, Europe passable, and the universities quite above the average, but that schools are barbarous. It is perhaps true that schools are not, and never will be, constituted on the same lines as other institutions which deal with older growths. The people's life through a certain period foreshadows the individual's life of a later state; in our own lives we are reproducing a course of action which required centuries of national life to complete for our fore-

fathers. The old Briton used his blunt stone-axe, and cursed no Government inspector; the right-minded child of to-day prefers his broken wooden doll to any new-fangled wax-work. The old Briton was no diplomatist, but he could break a man's head in very pretty fashion; some children's artless little squabbles sometimes recall his rugged old face.

Ancient Greece first of all thought γυμναστίκη was everything; late she began to see that μουσικὴ was just as important. But where is ancient Greece, and where is the ancient Briton? He is the Matrimonial Agency Man, the Cork Leg Maker, the Third-class Politician—in a modified form; but in his boyhood perhaps each one of these, certainly the last, was exemplifying in himself the recrudescence of an extinct national life; they blacked one another's eyes and thought no shame, but now they are men, and Nineteenth Century. But though public schools may represent the Barbaric or Healthy Age, it is not therefore to be assumed that during the course of time even their primitivism has not been modified. A schoolboy is synonymous to many with rude beast: but he is not such a beast as he was.

The "process of the suns" has done something even for him, and Pop-canes are now little more than relics of an age when power was right and muscle absorbed every other consideration of morals and manners.

And what does this point to? It points to the fact that the athletic maintains his position, not by right of might but by force of character. It requires great force of character; long days of groaning-work, long days of strict self-denial, courage, perseverance, and moderation—to become a successful athlete; it requires more to hold the position when won. It is not held by force of canes or hard words, but by the force of the qualities which make a man to endure to the end—to cast failure's gibe back in its teeth, and to inspire the respect which singleness of purpose always meets with. The mere book-worm does not lead, not because he is no athlete, but because he is not a leader of men; the athlete succeeds, not because he is no book-worm, but because he possesses the qualities which carry men to great deeds and to fame. When the book-worm can lead, as he sometimes can, there is no athlete that can stand up before him, either in our microcosm, or in that bigger world of which our own is only a dim foreshadowing.

On the Edge of the Khud.

By GEORGIANA CHATTERTON.

"BUT, my dearest child, you should think of others."

"Of others! Not myself, then, mother?"

"Others *with* yourself, dear."

The speakers paused. Each, in accordance with the workings of her heart, felt reproachful towards the other, and rested silent.

Mother and daughter arranging, after the futile fashion in which we imagine we may arrange, the future of the one immediately concerned. In the face of the former might be traced that mixture of care and contentment so commonly discernible in faces of matronly middle-age, bespeaking the history that has been neither all joy nor yet all trouble, in that of the latter indication no further than displays the uncarven marble awaiting the sculptor's chisel; the room wherein she stood, the scene whereon she gazed, pretty well telling her history so far; the plain homely rectory drawing-room bearing testimony that no outer fashions or frivolities had invaded its walls; portraits of ecclesiastical dignitaries and family photographs presiding in spaces unknown to looking-glass or bric-à-brac, magazines of the severest type and parish records on tables denied to novels or society papers, a basket of undarned socks close to hand, and outside the little lawn, with its flower-beds cut in the turf, the half of which had departed from their original heart, crescent, and diamond shapes into odd wavering outlines of nondescript form produced by the ministrations of the one factotum, gardener, groom, and coachman consolidated, who tended them, and which for all the eighteen years that the girl had looked upon them had presented unvaryingly the same aspect according to the same recurring season; crocuses giving way to ranunculuses, ranunculuses to geraniums, then after the first frosts a spell of bare brown earth until the crocus again started the routine.

Just now the geraniums were having their turn, and shone gaily forth; the bees were ruffling the spikes of mignonette that

cropped up here and there amongst them with a pleasant lazy humming as they went; the air was sweet and heavy with the luscious breath of the blossom-laden lime trees; and the golden sun poured in through the open French window, caressing the curly bronzed head of the girl as she leant against it in her musing, as if kindly bidding her not so quickly to hurry away from them all. For to Eva Morrisson had arrived the hour wherein to decide the one way or the other the question that comes to almost every woman born of woman. "Here are the cross-roads of your life," says Fate. "Choose now on which path you will tread it out."

The eldest of the large family which customarily clusters within lightly endowed rectory walls, she had chanced at a neighbouring tennis party to meet with an Indian judge, whom at once she had captivated. Something about the girl's manner in its fresh frankness, about her appearance in its bonny youth and lissom grace, had charmed him as never before in his eight-and-forty years had he been charmed, and before the faintest inkling as to such intention on his part had occurred to her unconscious mind he had proposed to her. Assuredly her yea had not been yea, but, on the other hand, perhaps from sheer surprise, neither had her nay been nay; and so, warily, he had besought her to take time to consider the situation and then write to him her decision.

To Mrs. Morrisson the proposition had been joy undiluted. She embraced her child when she told her of it and congratulated her as if acceptance were a thing already concluded, and so great was the flutter of her delightful excitement that soon she transmitted a portion of it to Eva. With the wretched advantages which were all she was able to give her girl, such a marriage exceeded her most sanguine expectations, for here indeed had all of a sudden risen up position, means—Eva would never have to consider and toil to coax that one obdurate end to meet with that other equally obdurate one as for all her married estate she had been obliged to—interest: openings for the boys growing up, possibilities for the younger girls coming on. Under the infection of the glory arising out of all these visions, how could doubts as to any answer save an affirmative linger long in the mind of any one?

And yet as the girl was writing her letter the following afternoon, only just as she was writing her letter, some counter-feeling

had arisen, and even as the words were on her pen she had laid it down, and pushing the paper from her, had sprung to her feet with "No!" sounding from the bottom of her heart. What it was she did not know; why it was she could not have told you; there had come no influence interfering with that which was all upon the one side, no word, no sound, nothing save some occult voice within, some subtle knowledge where as yet no knowledge was, some under-current, dim, nebulous, undefined, that had stopped her, whispering, "Not yet! not yet!"

Flushed and determined, she had gone to tell her mother her fresh and final decision, which Mrs. Morrisson had listened to aghast and discomfited, had combated and gainsaid to her utmost, and terminated by reminding her that not herself alone was included in such wanton sacrifice of the good laid before her. And then for a space fell silence, broken only by the drowsy humming of the bees through the slumbrous sunny afternoon, whilst Eva stood erect and slender, with her young heart throbbing out its pros and cons, and her mother, yearning only for her good, watched her disquietedly.

"You see, dear child," she resumed at length, "it is not as if you had any dislike to Mr. Clifford. Mine would then be the last of all tongues to ask, or wish, or counsel you to marry him, for I should hold that a wrong to you and a wrong to him as well. But you have told me that already you so much like him, and that he is kind and good I can see for myself; and such being the case, the love will come; indeed, dearest, you will find it so. And think of the life he can open to you, the happy one for yourself and the useful one to the others; and we can do but so little here for you all. You know, dear child, how dull and small it is; you know how often you already have chafed against it, and fretted that you could not do as others can."

True, all true; and each word as she listened sank into Eva's heart. How often had she envied other girls of her age who went up to London and mingled with the crowd, and saw men and women as they were, and knew them, who trod the world's stage and acted on it, and not merely read about its play, as she was forced to do. How often had she longed restlessly to dress and talk and bustle with the rest, instead of idly droning here. Bordering the little lawn she looked upon was a hedge, and beyond that hedge the road, and beyond it again the grave-

yard round the church, and sometimes impatiently she had told herself that that represented all her life, the narrow monotonous limits, and then the grave. Besides, it was not always bright and sweet and sunny as in this present moment, but there came dreary seasons, when the bare brown earth routine set in, and all was grey and cold, and there was no scented out door air to loiter in.

* * * * *

Before the corn was garnered and the harvest festival held in the old square-towered church, Eva Morrisson was on her way to India with James Clifford as her husband.

And a wholly happy woman young Mrs. Clifford was; her letters were brimful of her life, and all the pleasure and sparkle therein. James was such a dear old thing, the dearest old thing; there was nothing he would not, did not, do for her. He had bought for her the handsomest pony in all the station, and she rode every morning. James did not ride, but there were always plenty who did, and she had learnt to in less than no time, and it was delightful. And there were tennis-parties, and polo and band-playing she went to in the cool of the afternoon, and races and *ghymkhanas* and lots of dances. And directly Flossie was grown up she must at once come out to her; no difficulty about the passage-money, as James would settle all that; James was always so kind and good, and they often talked about it. Poor Mrs. Morrisson's mother-heart swelled with joy and gratitude as each glowing mail came in, and many a prayer of thanksgiving for it all went up from under the old rectory roof.

By-and-bye some little alteration seemed to creep into the letters. They were less sparkling, and appeared as if more thoughtfully penned, not written straight off from the pleasure of the moment; the oft-quoted scheme as to Flossie's coming out dropped into abeyance, and a hint even fell as to a possibility of its instead being Eva returning to them, a change of air, and so forth. The climate, good Mrs. Morrisson concluded; that distant scorching land was trying her far-off bairn, and she looked with gladness on the rosy faces blooming round the table; at least she could do that much for them. But all this was of a later date, and had nothing whatsoever to do with the present, when young Mrs. Clifford was enjoying her life as a bird when first it feels power over its pinions, and when her husband,

watching her, used sometimes to wonder how he had been able to secure so bonny a one to shelter under his sober wing.

For James Clifford at eight-and-forty was as an old man. Some there are who are young at fifty, and some are elderly at five-and-twenty, and to this latter class indisputably he belonged, so that by the time he had reached his present age he felt old, looked old, and counted as old. It seemed but natural that he should drive, not ride; watch tennis, and not play it; go through his appointed part in the official quadrille at balls, and then lapse spectator only for the remainder of the revels; and the nearest approach to youth that since his college days he had felt was when introducing Eva to its pleasures and seeing her plunge gaily into their fresh novelties.

On all sides she easily won popularity. She was new, and that in itself in a circumscribed Anglo-Indian society was an attraction. She was gay and bright and good-nature personified. All her European dresses were welcome to the inspection of the other ladies to supply them with "hints" and "good ideas," and sections of her trousseau were for ever on the rounds undergoing copy at the hands of the *dirgars*. She did not appear to have the smallest notions as to any jealousy or rivalry, or anything of that description, no notions at all, indeed, that were not wholly open and above-board; she was not the least bit a dangerous woman in any respect, and such being the open verdict returned, she raised no animosity in the breast of any of the members of her own sex, whilst amongst the opposite one she was universally a favourite. Before she had been a few minutes inside a ball-room, her programme was entirely filled up; she invariably was surrounded by men at rides, and sports, and bands; her ante-tiffin *levée* at home was thronged by the officials and soldiers of the station, and in the court-martial of the mess-room not one dissentient voice had been raised against her.

"She's most awfully nice."

"Jolly little thing."

"Best little woman out."

"Gay as any skylark, and, tell you what, thorough good too. True as steel to old Thingummy."

"Ye—es, awfully nice; so she is." This was drawled by the Major, a man considerably senior to the others of the conclave. "Passionless little doll, though."

"Well, Norton, old chappie," cried out the youngest sub., "give us your word. Why so silent, oh connoisseur amongst the fair? What's your opinion, eh?"

"That the lady in question is too good to be under your discussion," and the speaker turned on his heel and walked out of the room.

"Great rot Norton taking it up like that!" grumbled the youth; "only just amongst ourselves."

"The greatest," agreed the Major.

So far as he personally was concerned, Mrs. Clifford had already been tried, and, according to his standard, found wanting. His was the rôle of laying siege to every young married woman who happened to come within his ken, and he had therefore exerted himself to be especially agreeable to her on her first arrival, being pleased to feel how success was promising to crown his efforts, until she herself all unconsciously had dispelled the illusion. He was fixing his day for going to visit her, and her unconcealed pleasure had been quite delightful to observe.

"Did you not say," he asked, bending to her and speaking low, "that Thursday is the day your husband sits in court?"

"Thursday, yes."

"That then," in a yet lower key, "shall be my day of call."

"But no," she had exclaimed in her clear girl's voice, that all the country might hear, totally misunderstanding her man. "It would be a pity he should miss you," and the most accomplished mistress of finesse could no more effectually have undeceived him.

She was young enough and guileless and unsophisticated enough to be ready to like every one, and to have every one in turn to like her, to dance, to ride, to chat with them all; she lived as carelessly as one of the humming-birds skimming in the sun, and she thought almost as little. With introspection she was unacquainted, as is commonly the case before the deeper feelings have been roused. A passion of grief such as sorrow could have taught her, an ecstacy of joy such as love might have shown her—what did she know of either? She had cried at leaving her parents and brothers and sisters, so for the blank of death was acquainted with the pin-prick of separation; she was fond of her husband, therefore was conversant with

affection masquerading as love. But stealthily, stealthily, the while crept on the avenger of the ignored passions, so subtly and unawares that for long she could not distinguish one from any other—perhaps because always, since first she had come, she had danced a good deal with Captain Norton, their steps did so well suit; had ridden often with him, as he principally had been her master of instruction; had talked much with him, because their conversation flowed so glibly.

Honestly, for some time unconsciousness reigned alike on his side, though of course he first discovered the inklings of what was to be. He marked her eyes, that went seeking him at parties before he had joined her, whilst she was all unaware they did so. He noted the first fleeting touches of embarrassment before she had felt their transitory inconvenience. He learnt it in dancing and in sitting and in talking when she was yet ignorant of it, and he loved her all the deeper for it, acknowledging so boldly to himself, and wilfully persisted in it, shutting his eyes recklessly to its consequences. And then—then were hers opened, but only after she had deeper drifted, for this was how it came to pass. They were out for an early morning ride, in highest spirits both. The charm of the sun as yet without its scorch, and the air, and the flowers, and the subtler, still more stimulating one of their own companionship, had laid their spells upon them; their laughter bubbled forth constantly; talk came easily, small silences that intervened no less pleasantly, to judge by features soft with smiles; then he discovered that something about her saddle had gone wrong.

"Your *syce* must, I think, have put it on a bit crooked from the first," he said.

"Oh, bother my *syce!* Then I must get off, I suppose."

"You had better, and let me settle it properly. You would not fancy going over the *Khud*, would you?"

"No, indeed!" she cried, shuddering away from mere thought of the deep ravine beneath, darkness and death, and up here above life so radiantly bright. "Never, never!"

Lightly down she sprang, and having rearranged her saddle to his satisfaction, he put her up again.

"My strap!" she said, bending to her foot; and somehow her head brushed against his. As he raised his face, their glances met, and stayed. What was it? In his eyes some strange glow,

in hers a new wild light—before they could be torn asunder, lips had joined and cleaved. . . . .

"You would not fancy going over the *Khud*," but so few minutes before he had said to her, and "No, never, never!" she had shudderingly replied, but alas and alas for the moral descent and the deep ravine of guilt that she had plunged herself headlong towards!

From that day began for her misery and mad enjoyment, despair and delight, months of living happy to intoxication when with Captain Norton, wretched to desolation if apart from him. About equal hung the balance of the scale, and then every one was talking, he told her, and their meetings must consequently become more *sub rosa*, and then the wretchedness began predominating for her, hating herself for hypocrisy to her husband, but unable to keep herself from her lover. Could she but gain strength enough to tear herself altogether from him she thought, and go home on some pretext! whilst all the time she but framed her days so as to keep with him, and he could not, did not, see half enough of her, he said.

Then came the end to it all. Her husband was to be away for two whole days, leaving early one morning, returning late the following night, and she was to be alone. Consequently, Captain Norton said he would not go to her bungalow, but would she meet him in the evening out in the semi-darkness of the budding moon, among the trees, when there would be nobody about to spy?

She was going, but she never before had taken any step so bold as this. She felt it keenly; her heart kept throbbing so, almost it hurt her; her whole frame trembled; she could see nothing clearly before her eyes. In place of the compound and the palms and mango trees kept ever rising up in front of them the old ivy-covered rectory walls and its little lawn and flower-beds, with the road running by them, and beyond the quiet graveyard where so many slept peacefully. How she had despised it all, yet how much better for her feet never to have taken her beyond those narrow precincts, thence to the silent grave, than have brought her to the ways whither they now were straying.

Again she heard her mother's words uttered long ago, and never since recalled, now all at once sound distinctly in her ears: "But, my child, you should think of others, others *with*

yourself." Clearly now she remembered them; clearly now they seemed again to point upon her acts. As if in a dream slowly along the verandah she went, starting for her tryst, out into the compound, past the bananas tall and rigid, and the bamboos flickering in the moonlight, when suddenly she found herself confronted by the doctor of the station, evidently agitated.

"Oh, Mrs. Clifford, I beg your pardon for startling you, but my business is urgent. Your husband——"

"My husband!" she urged him as he paused confusedly, screamed at him almost, from the tension of her high-strung nerves. "What of him? Has——"

"Nothing wrong with him; no, no, my dear lady! Your husband must be told something, I was about to say, if he is not too far to send to. I grieve to have alarmed you. My news is happily not of him, but"—good soul, he never did know anything of any one save in professional manner, and hastened to reassure her—"that poor Captain Norton—he knew him well, I think, and I should like him to be told—there are some little matters——"

"Told what?" came the husky whisper.

"He is dead, poor fellow. Very sad, very sad! Died an hour ago—cholera—a bad case—well and hearty at tiffin, and now dead. Heaven bless my soul!" as young Mrs. Clifford tumbled in a heap at his feet.

* * * * *

Some years afterwards Judge Clifford retired with a fine pension and a full purse. He bought as handsome a house as South Kensington contains, and therein he dwelt most happily with his still youthful wife, a quiet, gentle, rather sad-eyed young hostess, but very charming, as pronounced all the guests to whom she did the honours at his handsome dinner-parties, not over strong, as she had never quite recovered the effects of a most severe fever contracted when out in India. Older friends noted how, though she had seemed so much too young for him when they married, she had now quite grown up to him, and what a successful match it had turned out, and all the younger Morrissons got a helping hand in the world and, girls and boys according to their lights, had their separate reasons for being grateful to the summer that had made James Clifford acquainted with their Eva.

A Romance of Modern London.

By CURTIS YORKE,

Author of "HUSH!" "THE MYSTERY OF BELGRAVE SQUARE," "THE BROWN PORTMANTEAU," "DUDLEY," "THE WILD RUTHVENS," "THAT LITTLE GIRL," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

"JUST FOR TO-NIGHT!"

"So one day more am I deified;
Who knows but the world may end to-night?"

ROBERT BROWNING.

"The effort to be strong,
And, like the Spartan boy, to smile, and smile,
While secret wounds do bleed beneath our cloaks—
All this the dead feel not—the dead alone!
Would I were with them!"

LONGFELLOW.

MRS. OSGOOD GRAVES was giving a small dance to-night, and everybody was swinging and floating and twirling and gliding and otherwise disporting themselves to the strains of the latest popular band. (The Blue Hungarians, with their Red brothers had not yet come into fashion.)

Douglas had of course been doing various duty dances with his *fiancée*, who was looking radiant, and very nearly pretty. Douglas himself was looking anything but radiant. Indeed, he looked as surely never newly accepted lover looked before. His expression of sternness and gloom was noticed by more than a few of the house guests, and commented on variously.

"In Heaven's name, what is the matter with Conrath?" said Cyril to Bee, as they paused near a flower-banked window at the upper end of the room. "He looks as if he were condemned to death. Surely he and Fay can't have been quarrelling already?"

Bee looked across to where Douglas was standing leaning against the wall, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes bent moodily upon the polished floor in front of him.

"Perhaps he has a headache," suggested Bee. "I know he works fearfully hard. Or perhaps something has vexed him."

"Small doubt of the latter, I should say," observed her lover, with a languid smile. "As for a headache, no fellow should think twice of fifty headaches if he is newly engaged to the girl he cares for. By the way," he added somewhat abruptly, "I suppose there's no doubt that—er—that he *does* care for her?"

Bee opened her eyes very wide.

"Care for her?" she repeated. "Why, my dear Cyril, he adores her—simply *adores* her!"

"Well, he's not exactly what one would call a cheerful-looking lover, is he?" returned Sir Cyril. "You wouldn't like to see me looking like that, now, would you?"

"You *couldn't* look like that," she made answer saucily. "You always look the most tranquil, self-satisfied, ultra-conceited being in the room, wherever you may be."

"Do you really think so?" he murmured. "Shall we finish this waltz, or shall we sit it out?"

"No, indeed, you lazy fellow; we shall not sit it out. We shall just dance it to the very end," she answered decidedly.

Later in the evening she danced with Douglas. He had only asked for one dance—a waltz; and to that waltz he had been looking forward passionately and feverishly ever since he had inscribed his initials on Bee's dance card. It had been almost more than he could bear to see her floating round the room, ceaselessly, it seemed to him, in Cyril Northburgh's arms. Of course this was a state of mind highly to be condemned. But what will you? Hearts won't move to order, and as often as not move out of order. Indeed, most of us find a heart a more than sufficiently troublesome possession. Happy, perhaps, those who have none. Even Sir Cyril, you see, was occasionally driven off the lines of his usually tranquil repose of speech and manner.

When Douglas came to claim his dance, Bee looked up at him with a mischievous smile.

"I thought you had forgotten me," she said.

"You did not think so," he answered roughly—so roughly that Bee decided Cyril must be right—poor Douglas evidently had something on his mind.

The waltz had begun. It was a new one, a special favourite of Bee's, dreamily, passionately sweet—"one of those irresistible waltzes that first catch the ear and then curl round the heart."

A fierce joy took possession of Douglas as he put his arm

round Bee—for the first time since she had been a tiny child, and he a lad just beginning life, with his heart unawakened.

Away they floated down the room to the melting rise and fall of the fairy-like music, on—on—without stopping—without speaking. And to one of them, at least, that waltz was heaven.

For the time she was his, he thought, in a passionate trance of present bliss. She might belong to another man, he might belong to another woman, but for this one little quarter of an hour not even her lover might hold her nearer.

"*Who knows but the world may end to-night?*" The familiar words rang dreamily through his brain.

Once a light loosened tendril of her hair swept across his lips. He hardly dared to breathe, lest he should displace it. Once she spoke to him—some trifling words whose import he did not catch.

"Hush!" he muttered, holding her yet closer.

On—on they swept in rhythmical, even measure. The music had passed into a weird wailing minor, that seemed to stab the heart and wring it with sad half-forgotten memories. A vague depression, deepening almost to fear, came over Bee. Her companion's utter silence, the almost convulsive clasp of his arm and of the hand that held hers, gave to the dance the semblance of a long, passionate embrace.

"Douglas!" she whispered breathlessly, "Douglas! don't hold me so tightly; I don't like it. You are hurting me. Let us rest now."

Still without speaking, he steered their steps to a heavily curtained doorway leading into a small ante-room, half lit, and dim, and cool, with plants and jars of ice placed here and there. He whirled her into the damp grateful stillness, his arm still holding her closely to him. The arm was trembling, and his face was grey with a ghastly pallor. His eyes Bee did not see; the long lashes hid their passionate downward gaze. Perhaps it was as well. His arm clasped her closer—closer. He bent his head until his face almost touched hers.

"Bee," he whispered huskily, "you asked me to kiss you a few days ago—and I would not. Will you kiss me—now?" Then quite suddenly he let her go. "No—no," he muttered agitatedly. "Good God! What a brute I am!"

Bee, half amazed, half frightened, stood for a second or two in utter bewilderment. What had come to grave, quiet Douglas?

He had flung himself into a chair, and hidden his face. His breath was coming hard and quick. One hand covered his eyes; the other, as it lay upon his knee, shook perceptibly.

"Is anything the matter, Douglas?" Bee said in a puzzled tone, moving towards him and laying her hand somewhat timidly on his arm.

He looked up at her then. The passionate light had died out of his eyes, and he looked tired and old.

"Is anything the matter?" she repeated anxiously.

"No—nothing is the matter," he said, moving slightly away from her gentle touch.

"Were you faint—or giddy?" she went on wonderingly. "Why did you not stop sooner?"

"I couldn't," he answered, harshly enough.

He was sitting with bent head, and hands loosely clasped in front of him. Truly, there was not much of the successful lover or the brilliant author about him just now.

"Douglas, do you know, I think you work too hard," observed Bee after a short pause. "You are sometimes quite queer and unlike yourself. And just now, when you ought to be so happy—why, do you know that you are looking simply *wretched?*"

"Am I?" he said in an odd voice. "That is very strange."

"It is simply that you are working yourself to death," pursued Bee severely. "You should remember that you have Fay to think of now, as well as yourself."

"I am remembering that," he made answer quietly. He rose as he spoke, and pushed the short, thick hair wearily back from his forehead.

"Why, even Cyril noticed to-night——" began Bee, and stopped short. For Douglas had turned white with sudden anger.

"Cyril!" he repeated between his teeth. "By what right does he criticize my looks and actions? Is it not enough that he has——" Then with an effort he controlled himself, and said in a softened voice, "I beg your pardon, Bee. Forgive me. I don't know what's the matter with me to-night."

"Poor old fellow!" said Bee, mollified at once. "I believe you have a dreadful headache. So of course you feel cross and out of sorts."

Just then their retreat was invaded by Miss Leyden and her latest capture—a stalwart lieutenant of dragoons, who appeared

to be as hopelessly in the toils as could be desired, and glared ferociously at Douglas over an enormous black moustache. The latter returned the glare with less ferocity and more *hauteur*, and silently conveyed Bee back to the dancing-room, where he relinquished her to a reproachful youth who, it appeared, had been looking for her "everywhere."

Douglas went in search of Fay, to whom he was engaged for the next two dances. He could not find her—and he was very glad. So he went out into the grounds, which were bathed in the peaceful light of a pale shy moon. It was almost warm to-night. Not a breath of wind was stirring; but the air was singularly fresh and sweet, and the gardens looked like fairyland. Douglas, however, was in no mood to appreciate their beauties. He walked restlessly up and down the terraced walks for some time; then he went indoors and found his way to the morning-room, which was lit only by the firelight, being one of the few rooms not thrown open to the guests. He flung himself upon a sofa near the fire and abandoned himself to harassing thought. Was this sort of thing to go on always?—he wondered fiercely. And if so, would it be possible to make Fay his wife, his other self, his heart's companion as long as they both should live, while all the man in him cried out for that other woman so soon to be a wife—but not his? Then honour and common-sense made their whispers heard above the fierce voice of passion. He must accept the inevitable. It was too late to rebel—now. He must crush as best he might his love for Bee. He must make up his mind to be a loyal and tender husband—if not a loving one—to Fay. Otherwise—what lay before him?

Our lives are for the most part what we make them, you know. "When one has not what one likes, it is necessary to like what one has"—or, at least, to behave as if one liked it. It is rather a dreary motto, perhaps. But surely it is better to get up and kick circumstances, than lie still and let circumstances kick you. It is pluckier, at all events. Douglas, however, did not feel like kicking anything just now. The rebellious mood had passed, and he was weighed down by an overwhelming sadness—the ineffable sadness of knowing that life must henceforth be taken up on a consciously lower level.

"Poor little Fay!" he reflected, as he lay staring into the fire. She was not to blame for the snarl things had got themselves

into. And she loved him. Well—he was in a mood to find dreary comfort even in that fact. Perhaps when she was his wife—the mother of his children—perhaps, then, that other woman's face would cease to haunt him.

And at this point in his self-communings, Fay herself came to him.

"Bee says you have a bad headache, Douglas," she said anxiously as she knelt beside the sofa. "No—don't rise. Have you?"

"Yes, I believe I have," he said in an exhausted kind of way. And, indeed, his temples were throbbing painfully. He sat up as he spoke, and leaned his elbow on the arm of the sofa.

The firelight shone full on his face, and Fay went on softly, "I'm afraid it must be very bad, dear. You look quite white and ill. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you. It is nothing—nothing of any consequence." Then he added, "This was our dance, was it not? Do you mind remaining here instead of dancing?"

"Not at all," she answered in a low voice. "I should like it. And, indeed, I don't think you ought to dance any more to-night."

"Fay, I want to talk to you a little," he said after a minute.

"Yes, Douglas."

But whatever he had to say, he did not say it for some time. Fay took one of his hands in hers, and waited patiently.

It was wonderful what a change love had wrought in this hitherto somewhat cynical, worldly-minded, and seemingly undemonstrative girl. It is just such natures as hers, though, that fling themselves abjectly in the dust before their idols, heedless of the inadequate return they may get for their adoration, thankful if only they may bedew the feet of clay—which surely even they must one day see—with their kisses and their tears.

Fay had not realized, as yet, how little Douglas had to give her in return for her love. He was not a demonstrative lover, certainly, but his—she argued against her heart—was not a demonstrative nature. She did not know, you see, that all men are demonstrative at one period, at least, of their lives. She only knew that she was blest beyond all women. For was she not going to be his wife? And would he have asked her to be his

wife if he had not loved her? Had he not other things to think of besides the making of love and pretty speeches? For at this time she was very proud of her talented lover.

With a sudden passionate impulse she bent her head, and pressed her lips to the hand she held. Douglas started violently, for his thoughts had been far away; then, leaning towards her, he drew her gently within his arm. She quivered with joy at the unwonted caress, and let her head droop lower—lower—until it rested on his shoulder.

"I love you! I *love* you!" she murmured.

"I am afraid, my little Fay, that you love me more than I deserve," he made answer somewhat sadly.

She did not speak—only looked up at him with eyes so full of love and trust that his heart smote him with a keen sense of his own unresponsiveness. He smoothed back her hair with a light uncaressing touch, and he still kept his arm round her. He did not kiss her. He had never kissed her, with the exception of that one cold touch of his lips on the night he had asked her to marry him. And over this defection she had often wondered.

"Fay," he said abruptly, almost nervously—"we are going to spend our lives together—together until death shall part us. I want to tell you—to warn you. Don't expect too much of me. I—I am not a very good-tempered fellow, I'm afraid. I'm not a particularly good fellow—in any way; not in the least the kind of fellow you think I am. There will be days probably when I shall be unreasonable and gloomy, and very likely cold and unloving. Don't be disappointed—don't be vexed—when these days come. Just—let me alone. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she said, a little smile creeping round her mouth—"I understand. You mean that some days you will feel that you can't be bothered with me. But that is one of the penalties of marrying an author, I suppose?" she added,with a half-sigh. "One must come second."

There was a short silence; then Fay said quite suddenly, but with an unwonted shyness in her voice,

"Douglas, why do you never—kiss me?"

A quick displeased frown contracted his forehead. Her words jarred upon him, and dispelled the faint tenderness that had arisen in his heart for her.

"Have I indeed been so remiss?" he said coldly. "That is

easily remedied." And as he spoke he brushed her cheek lightly with his moustache.

So light and chill was this caress, indeed, that Fay passionately wished her impulsive words unspoken. Her face flushed painfully, and she stammered in dire confusion,

"Forget that I said that, Douglas. I—I don't know why I did. It was only silliness."

Douglas did not say anything—simply because nothing suitable occurred to him to say. He was not a man of ready speech at any time. And shortly afterwards Fay left him and went up to her room, where she cried herself into such a pitiable object that her going downstairs again that night was utterly out of the question.

The first cold breath of a vague disappointment had touched her. A little—a very little—of the bloom had been brushed off her perfect bliss. But what will you? In this world we must learn to enjoy our happiness, as well as our plums, with the bloom off. It doesn't materially affect the taste, you know. And yet—must we wait for Paradise before we see any perfect thing of which the perfection does not fade as we touch it? I suppose we must.

* * * * *

"I always feel so *wormish* after a dance," yawned Bee late on the afternoon of the following day, as she flung her book upon the hearthrug and leaned back in her chair with her hands behind her head.

"That's because you dance," observed Miss Leyden briskly. "You shouldn't dance. Then you'd be as fresh as a daisy next day."

She herself, by the way, never, or hardly ever, danced at all, but deliberately "sat out," with carefully selected partners, all through her programme.

"Well, but what does one go to a dance for," objected Bee lazily, "if not to dance?"

"One goes to a dance to make havoc in the heart of one's enemy—*man!*" said the other, making a naughty little face. "At least *I* do. And I find I can do it better by 'sitting out' than by dancing. It's all very well for beauties to fly about the room until every grain of powder is off their faces, and every bit of curl out of their fringe. They remain beauties, in whatever

guise. But I, minus powder and curls, am a diabolical fright, and I have the sense to know it. So there you are, you know. I never do more than one dance—a waltz. It's a fixed principle with me—all my men know it; and if the new ones don't, they get to know it," she concluded saucily.

"And who was the favoured recipient of your one waltz last night?" inquired Bee, regarding the speaker curiously.

"Let me see. Oh, *your* young man, Sir Cyril. He isn't brilliant—you'll forgive me saying that, won't you?—but he *can* waltz. I sat out two dances with the young man who writes," she added, after a pause, "Mr.—Mr. Conrath. He is rather nice, you know, and doesn't at all try to do the superior literary swell. I asked him if he would put me in his next book. I wonder if he will!"

"No, I'm quite sure he won't," said Fay Dinwoodie rather sharply.

She was sitting in a cosy oaken recess at one side of the fireplace, shading her face from the glow of the fire with a screen of peacock's feathers.

They were all in the morning-room—all the women, I mean. The men were conspicuous by their absence. Miss Leyden turned towards Fay with a rippling little laugh and said:

"I didn't see you, Miss Dinwoodie, in that secluded corner. (I *love* these corners so; don't you?) You and Mr. Conrath are going to be married, are you not?" she added, with a contemplative air. "Good gracious! what a blush! It's years since I blushed like that."

Fay did not answer. Her blush soon faded and gave place to her former unbecoming pallor. She was looking tired and heavy-eyed to-day, as if her night's sleep had not refreshed her—which, indeed, it had not.

A tall, lackadaisical-looking young woman here separated herself from a small group near the window and approached the fire.

"I think it's so interesting being in the house with two newly engaged couples," glancing sentimentally from Bee to Fay. "How happy you must both be! I was once engaged myself, you know," she added, with a sigh—"so of course I know all about it."

'*Once!*" echoed the irrepressible Miss Leyden, raising her well-

marked eyebrows. "It takes more than once, I can tell you, to know all about it. I'm not sure that I know all about it—and I've been engaged more times than I can remember."

Bee picked up her book again and smoothed out the leaves, her lip curling scornfully the while. Her hostess laughed. She was one of the few women who liked Miss Leyden, and always maintained that she was the kindest-hearted little woman in the world—where the matter of breaking men's hearts was not concerned.

Just then the door opened, and a few of the men entered—among them Douglas, who seated himself beside Fay in the gathering darkness.

"Fenwicke and I are leaving to-night," he said in a low voice, "by the 6.50. We have had rather bad news from those mines I told you of, and Max thinks we ought to be there."

"To-night!" she said, with keen disappointment in her tone. "Oh, Douglas, *must* you go?"

"Well, it's not a matter of life and death," he said, laughing a little; "but I think I'd better go. I intended leaving to-morrow or the day after, you know," he added carelessly, "so it won't make much difference."

Fay gazed at the fire, which she saw through a misty veil of tears.

"Shall you write to me?" she whispered.

"Certainly, if you wish it. Not that I shall have much to write about. There isn't much going on down there that would interest you." Then in an altered tone he went on, trying to catch a glimpse of her averted face in the semi-darkness, "Why, you foolish girl, what is the matter? You will see me again very soon."

But Fay did not answer.

Douglas and Fenwicke left that night, the latter evidently in the lowest spirits, the reason for which I shall explain later.

"Tell you what it is, Bee," observed Cyril as he bade that young lady good-night some hours later—"Conrath is going to make a regular fool of himself over those mines of Fenwicke's. As an engaged man he has no right to throw away the little money he has in such tomfoolery."

"How do you know that it is tomfoolery?" returned Bee hotly. "He and Mr. Fenwicke told me all about it, and I think it must

be a splendid mine. If Douglas thinks he can make more money by spending some, I think he is quite right."

"Pooh! Nonsense!" said Cyril contemptuously. "What can you possibly know of such things? As likely as not there is no mine at all."

Whereupon Bee, who was feeling inexplicably cross and desolate, flew into a passion (I'm afraid she was still something of a vixen!) and showed herself in all respects quite prepared for a violent quarrel.

But Cyril was rather a difficult person to quarrel with. He watched her angry little face for some time in silence, then observed tranquilly:—

"Our friends Conrath and Fenwicke would be flattered, would they not, if they knew the storm their mining operations have raised? Calm yourself, my dear child. You will be an old woman at thirty if you exhaust all your emotions as you do your—er—temper. You needn't try to get up a quarrel with me, you know. I couldn't quarrel with you to-night if I tried my level best."

"No—that's just it!" burst out Bee passionately. "One might as well try to make an impression on a piece of india-rubber."

"Well, india-rubber has its good qualities," was the imperturbable reply. "It would never do if we were both firebrands. We should be reduced to ashes in no time. Come, look your own sweet little self, and say good-night to me prettily."

He took her hands as he spoke, and drew her laughingly towards him.

And she, with a repentant sense of her own unwarrantable "crossness," submitted with a resigned little sigh, and allowed herself to be said good-night to as her lover would—and that ceremony took some time.

* * * * *

Matters at Poldornalupe were looking sufficiently serious. Some accident had occurred (the nature of which I forget), necessitating some rather costly repairs. And worse still, the lode on which the mine's owners had built so many aerial castles had disappeared, leaving "not a trace behind." Add to this blank prospect the fact that there were symptoms of discontent among the miners, and it will be seen that there really were sufficient reasons for Fenwicke's temper being less sweet than usual.

Dinner— if I may dignify by that name the singular meal which

Mrs. Potts placed before our friends—passed in comparative silence. Then, when Fenwicke had partially relieved his feelings by some exceedingly powerful remarks to the above-mentioned worthy female, he lit his pipe, crossed his legs, and relapsed into noiseless gloom.

Conrath was walking up and down the room, formulating his ideas as to some abstruse subject on which he had an article due for one of the magazines on the following day.

When some time had elapsed, Fenwicke's pent-up feelings found relief in speech.

"Of all dangerous, undependable, deceitful creatures on this earth, commend me to women!" he broke out suddenly and savagely. "There's no understanding them—no finding them out. They are a mass of lies and deception from head to foot, and their sole mission is to send men to the devil!" And the speaker dashed his pipe upon the ground, and buried his face in his hands.

Douglas paused in his promenade, and regarded his friend with pardonable amazement.

"Why, my dear fellow," he said, with a suspicion of unwilling laughter in his voice, "this is an entirely new line for you! I thought you rose superior to feminine blandishments?"

"Oh, yes," returned the other indignantly, "I daresay. Do you think I don't hear you laughing? Of course it's comic—awfully comic—to think of Max Fenwicke being in love with a woman. But it's true, for all that."

Douglas sat down, and struck a match, for his pipe had gone out. He knew he should hear the whole of Fenwicke's grievance presently, so he only said:

"I'm very sorry, old man; at least, I'm sorry you're so cut up about it. But—er—is the case quite hopeless?"

The person addressed made an impatient movement, signifying that the case was quite hopeless, then raised his head, stood up, and kicked an obtrusive piece of coal which overhung the grate.

"I swore—years ago—that I would never put myself in any woman's power again," he observed gloomily. "I had a lesson then enough to last any man his lifetime. Shows what an infernal fool I must be."

"Is it—er—Miss Leyden?" inquired Douglas.

"Oh, yes, it's Miss Leyden—cursed little flirt," was the savage

answer. "I could have sworn she cared for me. And when I—er—spoke to her this afternoon, I'll be hanged if she didn't tell me she's engaged to one of these baboons from Windsor!" And the speaker cast himself into his chair again.

"She certainly is a fearful flirt," observed Douglas, recalling certain looks and speeches during the two dances he had sat out with the young lady in question on the previous evening. "She's not worthy of you, old fellow. Forget about her."

"Oh, yes, I daresay—that's so easy, isn't it?" returned the other sarcastically. "Suppose I told you to forget about Fay Dinwoodie? You'd do it, I suppose—like a shot?"

Douglas smiled somewhat grimly.

"However," continued Fenwicke, picking up his pipe, which fortunately proved to be uninjured, and looking about for a match, "I feel better now I've told you about it. And after all, I've an idea she would have led me an awful life. They always do. I'm afraid you'll find it so, old chap. I never was so surprised in my life as when you told me you were engaged."

Douglas was silent.

"I hope you won't repent it, you know," resumed Fenwicke, squaring his shoulders, and plunging his hands into his pockets. "Most fellows do."

The other smiled slightly.

"Aren't you going a little on the line of the fox who lost his tail?" he said, leaning forward to fill his pipe anew.

"Ah, well—perhaps," was the somewhat rueful answer. "However—a truce to women and their devilries for the present. Look here, Conrath, we must try and raise some more money. I had no idea that mining was so confoundedly expensive. It swallows up coin like very deuce."

"But if the lode has disappeared," said Douglas (who had only a vague idea as to what a lode might be), "do you think it is worth while to go on?"

"Of course it's worth while," exclaimed Fenwicke irritably. "As Dempster says, it's only a 'fault.' We'll find it again. Good Heavens, man, you wouldn't have us abandon the thing now, after all we've spent on it? I'm confident there's a fortune before us, if we only persevere."

"I shall be able to put in something by-and-bye," observed Douglas, after a pause—"when I get my new book finished. I'm

to have a pretty fair sum for it. But I can't do anything in the meantime. By the way, Debenham might. He's come into some money, and wants to invest part of it."

"By Jove!—does he, though!" exclaimed Fenwicke excitedly. "Then I'll tell you what—we'll wire him first thing in the morning to come down. I remember meeting him once or twice. A quiet, decent kind of fellow—knows something of mining, too, if I remember rightly."

Accordingly a telegram was despatched on the following morning to Debenham, who joined our friends at Poldornalupe a couple of days later.

It was satisfactory to find that on inspection he shared Fenwicke's opinion regarding the mine. If he was not as enthusiastic, he was at least as sanguine—as he showed by agreeing to pay for the working thereof for the next six months, stipulating, however, that, in the event of the thing turning out a success, a third of the profits was to be his.

To those who knew him well there was a subtle but unmistakable change in Ralph Debenham. He was quiet and languid as of old; but his eyes had lost their hopeless look, and he had altogether the air of one from whose shoulders a well-nigh intolerable burden had fallen.

In the evening, while Max was busy with some intricate calculations, Debenham said suddenly:

"Come out for a turn, Conrath. There's a splendid moon, and—I want a walk."

They went out together, crossed the weed-grown carriage-drive, and took a short cut through a turnip field to the road, which the moon had whitened into a glorious track of silver, flanked by the thick darkness of the hedges. It was somewhat frosty, and their footsteps rang sharply through the moonlit silence. Neither spoke for some time; then Debenham said in a slow, deliberate kind of way—

"I have had news—since I saw you last. I don't suppose it will occur to you to imagine what it is. So I shall tell you. It is about my—wife. She is—dead."

Douglas turned quickly, and looked at him without speaking.

Debenham smiled, a curious still smile.

"You are not quite sure whether you ought to congratulate me or not?" he said. "Well—you may. Her death is a matter of deep

thankfulness to me. Not even when I saw her lying stiff and cold in her coffin did the slightest feeling of tenderness revive in my heart for her. And yet, poor girl, I loved her—once."

"It has been hard lines for you," said Douglas when they had walked some little way in silence.

"Ay, it has been hard," answered Debenham in an almost passionate underbreath—"bitterly, cruelly hard. But, thank God, it is over—like an evil dream. And so let it rest." Then he added in an altered voice, "But about yourself, Douglas. Some one told me you were engaged to be married. Is it true?"

"Yes," the other made answer after a pause—"it is true enough."

His companion looked at him attentively for a second or two.

"Is it—to little Bee?" he said.

"No—it is not to little Bee."

"Do you know—I'm very much surprised," continued Debenham slowly.

"Are you? Why?"

"Well, my dear fellow, to tell you the truth, I had got it into my head somehow that you cared for her, and—well, it just shows how one may be mistaken."

"Yes, it just shows," replied Douglas somewhat grimly. "Miss Adeane has been consecrated to Northburgh, so to speak, for some time. They are now definitely engaged, and are to be married early next year, I believe. As for me—I am going to marry Fay Dinwoodie. At least, I am going to marry her when her mother considers that I can afford to do so. In the meantime—we are engaged."

Debenham did not answer. There was a curiously rigid look on his face, and as he removed his cigar from his lips his hand shook visibly.

Presently Douglas spoke again.

"Are you not going to congratulate me?" he said in an expressionless voice.

The other started.

"Of course I congratulate you," he answered. "I hope you will both—be very happy."

"Some of these days I hope to congratulate you," said Douglas, after rather a long silence. "You told me once—do you remember?—that there was a woman you were fond of

—a woman you would have married if you had been free. I hope that—er—that it will be all right now."

Debenham shivered slightly, and threw away his cigar.

"Oh no," he said very quietly. "That is all over."

The words fell with a somewhat dreary sound on the stillness. Douglas could find no other words to answer them.

"It is chilly," said Debenham after a few silent minutes had passed. "Shall we turn back?"

They walked back to the house without speaking a single word. Debenham, indeed, was strangely silent all the rest of the evening.

But then he was never a talkative fellow.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH BEE IS IMPRUDENT.

"Faithful she is, but she forsakes;
And fond, yet endless woe she makes;
And fair, but with this curse she's crossed,
To know her not till she is lost!"

GEORGE MEREDITH.

"He smiled as men smile when they will not speak
Because of something bitter in the thought."

E. B. BROWNING.

AN undesirable contingency at an indefinite distance never holds such vivid possibilities of unpleasantness as a similar contingency which a comparatively few to-morrows will certainly turn into a contingency of to-day. There are so many Micawberish "perhapses" lying between.

Thus Bee had hitherto looked upon her marriage as an event which was as yet too far in the future to be an actively disagreeable prospect, though a steadily nearing one. Some of us may have felt the same in contemplating death, old age, or imminent bankruptcy.

But it so happened that Cyril—who, after the manner of his unhappy sex, no sooner got what he asked for than he straightway felt entitled to ask for as much again—now began to chafe at what he justly felt was an unnecessary delay, and pressed Bee to consent to their marriage in the early summer. And in this old Chandleur fully concurred.

"I'll have no shilly-shallying," the latter had said to Bee only two days ago. "The fellow wants to be married soon—and very natural, too. And marry him you shall, my girl—or maybe he'll be crying off altogether. And that'll be a nice tale for your friends—that your fine lover's jilted you. You take your chance when you have it. No other young sprig of aristocracy 'll want to marry you—*I'll* go bail."

Bee bit her tongue until it bled that she might not speak the hot, furious words that rushed to her lips. Her grandfather had been strangely moody and irritable of late. He seemed to be relapsing into even more than his old coarseness of speech and action, and on several occasions had given way to such terrible fits of passion—especially when his potations had been somewhat deeper than usual—that neither his wife nor Bee had dared to cross him in any way whatever.

Bee sat late in her room that night—thinking.

"Why do I shrink so from marrying Cyril?" she asked herself over and over again. "It is so different with Fay. She says she would marry Douglas to-morrow if he wished it. And I suppose that is how one ought to feel."

She rose and walked restlessly up and down for a long, long time—until she heard the clocks strike three. Then all at once she flung herself into a chair, her hands clasped hard and tightly on her lap.

"I don't love him," she whispered under her breath—"I don't love him. And I should never come to love him—*never!* Not in that way. I like him—I like him very much. But if I married him—I should *hate* him. Ah! what shall I do? If I had only some one to advise me—to *tell* me what to do!" And the poor girl broke into bitter, silent weeping.

Next morning, when Cyril paid his almost daily visit, he found her so heavy-eyed and wretched-looking, that he almost drove her mad by his affectionate anxiety. For the apparently cold-hearted Cyril could be very tender and affectionate upon occasion, and his unwilling little bride-to-be had wound herself very tightly round his heart, or his fancy, or his passions—or perhaps all three.

"My dear girl—you are ill," he said in a deeply concerned voice. "You ought to have a thorough change—instead of looking forward to a fatiguing London season. I can't have you

looking like that. Be a dear sensible little woman, now, and let us be married quietly out of hand—say in a fortnight; and then I can carry you off to some quiet place on the Continent, or anywhere you like, and——"

But she interrupted him by an almost hysterical passion of sobs, which dismayed and alarmed him so much that for some time he thought of nothing but soothing her, totally ignoring her tearful assurances that she was quite well, and didn't want any change, and that she was very, very unhappy, and didn't want to be married at all.

To all this Cyril only murmured a few loving words now and then—stroking her hair the while with exasperating tenderness. To poor Bee this was far worse than any other mode of procedure would have been. It seemed as if an invisible net were closing round her—a net which she could not break away from, for its meshes were hard and strong as steel. And when Cyril at last rose to go—he took her in his arms and gently but deliberately kissed her mouth. Somehow she felt too weak and too miserable to resist him. That kiss seemed to knit the meshes nearer and closer still.

* * * * *

Conrath got home that night in a somewhat depressed mood. He had again been spending a few days at Poldornalupe, and had left Fenwicke there, full of hope, and enthusiasm, and plans. Conrath himself was worried about one or two things—amongst others his book, which had suddenly come to a standstill, owing to the author's discontent with what he had already written. As a matter of fact, it was the best thing he had done; but he was out of sorts, had been working too hard, and was in consequence inclined to look upon everything with a jaundiced eye. For very little he would have pitched the whole MS. into the fire—ignoring the fact that he had promised his publishers it should be in their hands within the next fortnight.

When he entered his sitting-room, he uttered a quick sharp exclamation of intense surprise.

For a slim figure in a long fur-trimmed cloak rose from the hearthrug to meet him—a figure with a pale little face, eyes heavy with tears, and the mouth pathetically drooping.

It was Bee, of course. I need hardly tell you that.

As Douglas closed the door, and advanced hastily into the

room, she ran towards him, and threw herself almost into his arms.

"Good Heavens, Bee—has anything happened?" he exclaimed anxiously.

"No, no—nothing," she said in a sobbing, breathless kind of way. "At least—nothing new."

He placed her gently in a chair near the fire, and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, looking down at her for a second or two without speaking. It seemed so sweet, so natural, to see her sitting there—the firelight and lamplight flashing on her bright, piled-up hair, her dear little face upturned to his with tear-dimmed trusting eyes, from which the child-look he knew so well had never faded.

"Why have you come here, Bee?" he said in a low agitated voice. "Do you not know how late it is? What on earth——" He stopped.

Her lip quivered; two large tears gathered on her lashes, and fell on the smart evening-gown her cloak only partially concealed.

"You are in some trouble, Bee," Douglas said, bending over her, and making a wild effort to speak calmly. "What is it? Surely something has happened?"

"I am very, very unhappy," she said miserably. "And I could think of no one but you to help me—to advise me."

"But your lover—your future husband—can he not advise you?" he answered coldly. "And do you think, Bee, that he will like your coming here?"

"Oh, I don't care what he likes!" she exclaimed passionately.

"Ah, you have had some quarrel with him, then? Is that it? But, my dear child, why come to me? Don't you know that it is not—that it is not——" He broke off impatiently.

Why should he explain to her innocent mind what a terrible breach of *les convenances* this visit was? Why should he enlighten her as to what a cruel, cold-hearted world would say to it? She knew no harm in it, bless her! Was it not natural that she should come to him if she were in trouble, as she used to do long, long ago? Did it not show that the memory of their childish companionship was strong upon her still?

But she had seen the cloud on his brow as he spoke, and noted the vexed compression of his lips.

"Ah, Douglas!" she said reproachfully, "whom should I come to, if not to you? But if it displeases you—if you have other things to think of than me and my—my insignificant troubles, then of course I can go. I—I don't want to be a trouble to you." She rose as she spoke, and drew her cloak round her with hands that trembled.

"Bee—you are unjust," he said gently, laying his hands on her shoulders, and making her face him. "You know very well that nothing concerning you is ever a trouble to me. But, my dear, do you not understand that—that it is different now from the old days when we were children? You *must* know that, Bee," he continued very earnestly. "You must know, too, that—that it is not considered the thing for young ladies to visit men in their lodgings at night. Good Heavens! what am I saying to you—you pretty innocent child——" He broke off suddenly, beginning to pace the room with quick uneven steps.

"But, Douglas"—remonstrated Bee, regarding him with wide-open, startled eyes, and a considerably heightened colour, "of course I should never dream of going to any one else—not even Cyril," blushing more deeply still. "But you—you are quite different. Why, you are my dear old brother—at least the only brother I ever knew."

"That is nonsense," he returned, his face pale and very stern. "You know—every one knows—that I am *not* your brother."

Bee began to be a little frightened at the nature of the escapade she had committed.

"I see," she said after a pause. "I see. People might—might wonder. And——" She stopped, her face crimson. "I—I won't come again, Douglas," she added, looking down nervously at the carpet. "But—as I am here—will you not let me tell you how wretched I am? No, don't say I must go—not for a minute or two. Ah, Douglas—be a brother to me just for to-night, and tell me what I ought to do." And she began to sob broken-heartedly.

Her sobs cut him to the quick.

"Don't!" he said somewhat unsteadily. "Don't cry. Tell me your trouble—and if I can help you in any way, I will. Have you quarrelled with Sir Cyril? Or have you broken off your engagement and then repented, my impulsive little Bee? Or"—frowning—"has he been unkind to you?"

"Oh no, no," she made answer wearily. "He is kindness itself—and I am sure he would never dream of quarrelling with me. As for my engagement being broken off—I wish with all my heart it were!" she concluded passionately.

"You—you do not love him, then?" he said, speaking with a calmness he was far from feeling. "You were mistaken in thinking you cared for him. It is a little hard on him—is it not?"

"But, Douglas, I told him at Haricott Hall that I was afraid I did not love him enough. And he—he did not seem to mind. He said that I should come to love him—afterwards."

"And—you did not?"

"I did not want to *marry* him," sobbed the poor child. "And I don't want to marry him now. And he—he wants me to marry him quite soon. He spoke of a fortnight! Think of it, Douglas—a *fortnight!* And grandfather is so cruel—he says I must. Oh, I wish—*how* I wish—that mammy had lived!"

"I wish to God she had," said Douglas brokenly.

There was a dead silence for a little while. The fire breathed softly. The subdued roar of the streets reached them as sounds in a dream. Bee's sobs had ceased.

Douglas was struggling with a mad ungovernable desire to take the forlorn-looking little creature in his arms—forgetting the bonds that held him—to kiss away her tears, to whisper that his love for her was none of a brother's, but far, far nearer and dearer, and more tender. His little girl! How could he bear to see her tears—her sad childish eyes? He shut his teeth hard on his under-lip. What vision was this he saw in the flickering firelight? A vision that held his heart and senses like a spell. He and she together in some cosy unpretentious home, bearing all adverse times bravely and cheerily because of their love for each other. He and she together slowly climbing the path to fame and perhaps to fortune. How she would help him! how she would inspire him! He and she together, until death's cold hand should part them—for a little while. His brain seemed to reel.

Fay? What of her? She would console herself, doubtless. Women of her type always did. Honour? Where was the honour in swearing to love and cherish one woman with every pulse throbbing passionate love for another? Sir Cyril? Damn Sir Cyril!

He drew a long shuddering breath.

"Bee," he said in a low trembling voice—"is it—that you love some one—else? Is *that* why you cannot marry Cyril? Has another love come into your heart, my little one?"

"Oh no, no," she answered impatiently. "I don't love any one—in that way. *Must* one be in love with some one? It is so silly. I want to be free—quite, quite free. I don't want to have any more lovers as long as I live."

Douglas smiled—a queer ghost of a smile. The vision had faded. After a minute he said, without looking at her—

"But are you sure you are not making a mistake, Bee? Sir Cyril is a very good fellow—and very fond of you. Of course it is only natural that he should wish to have you all to himself as soon as possible—especially as there is no reason for delay."

"Then," said Bee somewhat defiantly—"you would advise me to marry a man I do not love?"

"No," he answered quietly. "But I think you do love him—though you do not know it. Take care what you are doing, Bee. Don't break your lover's heart for a mere fit of petulance—or because you don't know your own mind. Men don't—get over these things so easily—as women think."

"I fancy I see Cyril breaking his heart," returned Bee derisively. "His is much too well-regulated a heart to break—or even to crack. It's all very well for you, Douglas," she continued, with a quick catch in her breath. "But suppose you hadn't cared a straw for Fay, and were driven into marrying her? How then? Would you be happy? *Would* you?"

"No," he answered, in a voice that held what seemed to Bee an inexplicable ring of pain—"I don't suppose I should be happy."

"Then how do you think I can be?"

"Because, as I have told you, I think you do care for Sir Cyril. And I think I know you better than most people do—better even than he does."

He sat down at the table as he spoke, and leaned his head on his hand.

"I don't care for him as Fay does for you," said the girl sadly. "If there is such a thing as this love that one reads of and hears of, why shouldn't I wait and see if it comes to me too? Why must I marry a man just because he and grandfather wish it? You are as bad as the rest of them, Douglas. I thought I should

be sure to get some comfort and help from you. But you are so apathetic—so indifferent. You no longer care for me as you used to do. You might spare a little from Fay to help me, I think."

"Do you know how deep your words cut, I wonder?" he said, looking down at her with an expression in his dark eyes that she did not in the least comprehend. "I care for you so much that it breaks my heart not to be able to help you. But, Bee, this is a matter in which no one can help you but yourself. Think carefully if you are not throwing away your life's happiness for a girl's foolish caprice. But if it is no caprice—if you really cannot love this man—let no one force you to marry him. If he is the man I believe him to be, he himself would not wish it. Explain everything to him; defy your grandfather, if need be; but, for God's sake, let nothing—*nothing!*—persuade you to give yourself body and soul to a man you do not love. Think what the marriage tie is—or if you do not know, get some one to tell you. Think how young you are; think of the long, long years you may have to spend together——" He sprang from his chair, and walked up and down the room, trying to conquer his supreme agitation.

Then all at once he turned and faced her again.

"But why do you take me for your counsellor in your love affairs?" he said almost fiercely. "Do you think I cannot see that all this is the outcome of some petty misunderstanding, and that you love him as well as your cold girlish heart knows how? Why make *me* judge between you? Have you no pity? Do you not see what a miserable, hunted wretch I am? Do you know that my life is a daily, nightly torture? Why do you come here to madden me with your voice and eyes, and the touch of your hands? To remind me—to remind me——"

He stopped, and flung himself into a chair, horrified at what he had said—dreading the inevitable consequences.

But to Bee the idea that he loved her with a lover's love was so unthought of—so utterly out of the question—that she never dreamt of interpreting his words in that way. Indeed, she attributed to them a very different meaning. For Fay had told her only the day before that Douglas had been quite jealous of the harmless attentions of a guileless youth called Raymond, who persisted in sending her flowers and music and other such innocent trifles; that, in fact, Douglas had been quite cold and stiff

and disagreeable over the matter, and had gone down to Cornwall without even bidding her good-bye. As Fay was evidently intensely unhappy, and in the very lowest possible spirits, Bee naturally concluded that Douglas was in a similar condition, and reproached herself heartily for having worried him with her own affairs. As a matter of fact, Douglas's jealousy had existed only in Fay's imagination, and he had gone down to Poldornalupe at half an hour's notice in answer to a peremptory wire from Fenwicke. But, of course, Bee could not know this. She knelt down beside him, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Dear Douglas, forgive me," she said in her sweet vibrating voice. "I might have known that you were depressed and unhappy just now. You are vexed about—about Fay, are you not?"

He looked at her for a moment; then he laughed—a laugh that in a woman would have been hysterical.

"Ah, yes," he said in a voice that Bee hardly recognized—"I am unhappy about Fay, of course. How well you divine my thoughts, Bee."

His face was white—even his lips; and his hands were trembling.

"I must take you home," he said presently in a low voice. "It is late—and they will be anxious about you."

He rose as he spoke; and she rose also, and began to fasten her cloak.

"You look so tired," she said. "I am sorry to take you out. But perhaps you were going out at any rate? Perhaps you were going to see Fay?"

"No," he answered—"I am not going to see Fay to-night."

"She is very unhappy," the girl went on in a low voice.

"Well," he answered moodily—"most of us are unhappy, are we not? Even you—you poor child."

As he spoke he drew her cloak closer about her neck, and fastened it. His heavy eyes met hers for a few brief seconds; and hers were full of tears.

"Ah, Douglas," she said—and her sweet voice quivered—"I wish we were both children again. Don't you?"

"I don't know," he answered drearily. "Sometimes I almost wish we were both dead."

"*Douglas!*" she exclaimed, with a quick terrified little sob.

"Hush, dear! Of course I didn't mean that," he said, trying to

look and speak as usual, and succeeding very badly. "You are not going to cry, are you?" he continued, bending his head to see her downcast eyes and averted face.

And at this most inopportune moment the door opened, and a domestic announced Sir Cyril Northburgh.

There was a very curious expression in Sir Cyril's eyes as he advanced slowly into the room. His face was of an unnatural whiteness, and his nostrils were quivering slightly. But otherwise he was calm and unmoved as usual.

Douglas, who possibly had not been man of the world long enough to have his emotions under such complete control, muttered an ugly word between his teeth, and flushed to the roots of his hair—which, all things considered, was rather unfortunate.

There was an almost imperceptible pause; then both men bowed as slightly as was consistent with good breeding—rather more slightly, indeed.

Sir Cyril, without a shadow of expression on his clear-cut face, addressed Douglas. He had not taken the smallest notice of Bee.

"I promised my cousin to call upon you this evening, Mr. Conrath," he said in his wonted cool even tones (if his voice held a certain unwonted repression, it was barely noticeable). "She is anxious to see you. When you are disengaged, perhaps you can spare her half an hour."

Coldly courteous though his words were, there was a nameless something in his face and voice that filled Bee with a chill undefined dread. The anger of these cold, habitually self-contained men is apt at times to be rather a terrible thing. To her dismay, he turned to leave the room without so much as a glance in her direction.

"Cyril," she said, turning rather white—"are you not going to take me home?"

The poor child's voice quivered. A sick fear of what she had done took possession of her.

Cyril, who would rather have died (figuratively speaking) than be actively rude to a woman, paused at once.

"Certainly," he answered coldly and haughtily—"if you wish it. I thought you would possibly prefer—that your friend should do so."

"One moment!" said Douglas hoarsely (hitherto he had been incapable of speech). "One moment, Sir Cyril! You must allow me to explain that I alone am to blame for Miss Adeane's presence here to-night. She did not know—did not dream of the——" He stopped; for, in truth, lies—even chivalrous lies—did not come readily to his lips.

Sir Cyril's eyes flashed—as only blue eyes *can* flash.

"I do not require Miss Adeane's actions to be explained by you, sir," he said in a tone that made Douglas long to strangle him. "It will be time enough for you to give your explanations when you are asked for them."

The deliberate insolence of his words and manner all but sent Douglas over the boundary of self-control. But, for Bee's sake, he held himself hard in curb—though the thick veins stood out on his temples like whipcord, and his very lips were white with passion.

"You know very well I cannot answer your insulting words here and now," he said, forcing himself to speak quietly—but it was a dangerous quietness. "Perhaps you can make it convenient to see me to-morrow. In the meantime—do not let me detain you. No doubt you have other engagements, and——" glancing at his watch—"if I am to see your cousin to-night, I had better do so at once."

Bee, who had been listening to this passage at arms with a wildly beating heart, now exclaimed in a passion of terror:

"Oh, don't! *Don't* look at each other like that! Cyril—indeed it was all my fault. Douglas had no idea I was coming. He wanted me to let him take me home ever so long ago—but I would not."

A peculiarly unamiable expression flitted over Sir Cyril's face; but it was gone instantly.

"Mr. Conrath may congratulate himself upon possessing such a loyal champion," he said icily.

One of Douglas's hands was resting on the table. At Sir Cyril's words the strong fingers opened and shut convulsively—otherwise he took no notice.

"Are you ready?" said Cyril, turning to Bee, and speaking in the same cold, indifferent tone as before. "I am sorry to hurry you; but, as Mr. Conrath suggests, I have several other engagements this evening."

For one instant Bee let her hand rest on Douglas's arm in a mute good-bye. But he removed it gently.

"Go!" he said in a strange panting underbreath.

And without a word she let Cyril take her downstairs, and out into the street.

The clocks were striking nine. Stars were shining, and a touch of frost was in the air. In the next street a barrel-organ was wailing out an old, old waltz-tune. Bee never heard it afterwards without a sick tightening of the heart.

"You had better take my arm," Sir Cyril said, still in that strange unfamiliar voice. "I am afraid we shall have to walk some little way before we get a hansom."

Which, indeed, for some inscrutable reason, proved to be the case.

Bee felt weak and tired. She clung to her lover's arm tremblingly, wishing passionately to be at home, that she might indulge in the feminine weakness of a "good cry."

How white and stern Cyril looked in the pale starlight. What was he going to say to her? Would he break off their engagement? Just what she had been wishing for, surely. Ah, yes—but she did not want him to take the initiative in the matter. She did not want to be contemptuously cast off as if she had done something disgraceful. And, after all, what had she done? Nothing so very dreadful. And yet—even Douglas had seemed shocked and perturbed to see her there.

If Cyril would only speak! But he did not. And a few minutes later he hailed a passing hansom. The short drive was as silent as their walk had been, and by the time they reached Portland Place Bee was feeling so nervous that she could have screamed. Fortunately, Mr. and Mrs. Chandleur were dining out, so her absence would pass unchallenged.

Mechanically unfastening her cloak as she went, she made her way to the library, where a large fire was burning.

Sir Cyril followed her into the room and closed the door.

(*To be continued.*)